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MOTHERS WHO LIVE APART

FROM THEIR CHILDREN

by

Julie Thacker

BSc., The University of Northern British Columbia, 1997

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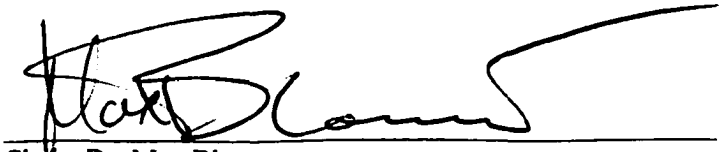

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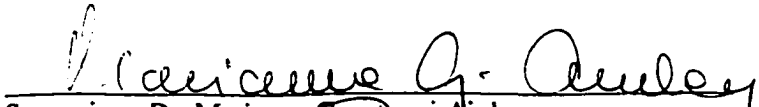

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ABSTRACT

My thesis contributes to a feminist perspective on motherhood and fulfills an urgent need for more information about mothers who live apart from their children. This topic grew out of my personal experiences and my understanding of the feminist philosophy that people's stories need to be told so that their experiences are not denied. In discussions with mothers over the past several years I became aware that mothers without their children feared and experienced negative social judgement if their status became public knowledge. While taking Women's Studies courses, I learned that little information was available about mothers who lived apart from their children and began wondering if the oppression they were describing was related to marginalisation. If this is the case, then research resulting in new knowledge about their lives should help reduce it. Consequently, I chose to fill this gap in our understanding about these women's lives for my graduate research.

My research explores through interviews the lives of six mothers who live apart from their children. Standpoint Theory provided the epistemological framework for my research and I used Grounded Theory methodology to conduct my research. The results of my participatory research project show that our social structure oppresses these women who live apart from their children and because of this they are marginalised. It also indicates a need for social transformation and policy change to reduce the discrimination and oppression they experience.

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INTRODUCTION

> As she gave one final push, I saw the child slip out of her body, a perfect baby girl. I was a 'father!' We all shouted for joy. As I felt the tears trickle down my cheeks, I looked around the room and met the doctor's and mid-wife's eyes; they too were crying. This perfect child would not grow up in the care of her loving mother; she was to be adopted. The young mother for whom I was a labour coach was mentally challenged. She was deemed an unfit mother. Our community had no support system in place to help her raise her child. I brought my friend flowers, candy, and perfume; I handed out candy sticks instead of cigars. The last day I saw her and her daughter we walked to the nursery together and talked. We talked about her dreams and hopes for her daughter and how she prayed that her daughter would have a loving safe home. Then we cried together because we knew how much she wanted to care for her daughter herself and the insurmountable obstacles that stood in her way.
>
> Personal Reflections from
> December 1980

Leaving the young mother's room I stopped to chat with the midwife about the next meeting of the Mission Childbirth Education Association (MCEA).[1] We discussed the improvements in the maternity ward's atmosphere since the new non-institutional furnishing and lounge that our association had lobbied for were installed. We chatted about how the administration, staff, and the physicians were reacting to the changes and the likelihood of the new birthing bed arriving for my own delivery in June. Working together, our association gained the right for mothers to determine many of the procedures involving our children's births. Included were the rights to choose our birthing position, if and how much pain relief we wanted, and whether we would have intravenous fluids, enemas, shaves, and automatic episiotomies. As I gave birth to my own daughter in June, I did not stop to ponder

[1] The Mission Childbirth Education Association (MCEA) was an association I belonged to in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was one of the first community-based birthing education and lobbying associations in British Columbia's lower mainland. It was instrumental in instituting more family oriented birthing practices in our community hospital and also provided some of the impetus that eventually resulted in the Grace Maternity Hospital in Vancouver. Grace Hospital has since become BC's Women's Hospital and Health Centre.

that I would have less autonomy in how I parented her than I had in her birth. It was not until several years later that I realised how little authority I had to determine how I mothered her.

Sifting through my experiences and those of my friends I noticed a common theme - none of us actually determined how we mothered our children. We chose whether we breast-fed two months or two years, but our physicians determined when our children started on solids and when they were ready to use their Jolly Jumpers. If mothers had problems, as I did, the experts came in and instructed us on child management.

Meanwhile, I became aware of another hidden aspect of our community -- not all mothers raise their own children. Because they were deemed too young to be mothers, several of my friends gave their children up at birth. Other friends' children were institutionalised, receiving ongoing care for medical conditions. Like myself, still other mothers had children die from accident or illness. All of us grieved at the loss of our children. Eventually I came to terms with the grief and moved forward. As my other two children grew, I looked around for outside interests, began college, completed a B.Sc. in psychology, and eventually entered the Gender Studies Masters Program. My thesis topic originated from my desire to investigate the lived experiences of mothers, like my friends and myself, whose children were not with them. In discussion with my thesis committee, however, I decided that the current related and narrower topic of "Mothers Who Live Apart From Their Children" would be more manageable. In completing the analysis of my data, I began to appreciate their wisdom. My data include enough variables without introducing more.

In my thesis, I studied a group of mothers who live apart from their children to draw attention to how they experience motherhood as mothers who do not meet our accepted

cultural norms. These mothers are often invisible in our society and their experiences are unacknowledged. They live at least this aspect of their lives at the margins of society. Writing about their experiences increases their visibility and contributes to redefining motherhood from a woman's perspective. It is part of the process of learning about our diversity as mothers and respecting that diversity. According to Sandra Pollack:

> Women-defined motherhood means that *all* mothers have something valuable to share, should be listened to, and appreciated, that learning about our diversity is what will enable us to feel good about our mothers and ourselves as mothers. That woman-defined motherhood is learning how to better love ourselves and our mothers.[2]

I also believe that all mothers, including those who live apart from their children, have something valuable to share with us and my research gives them an opportunity to speak on their own behalf about their experiences. As non-custodial parents, they all share a common feature of living apart from their children and being unable to make decisions affecting them. They are not, however, a homogeneous group. Among the many factors that contribute to mothers living apart from their children are divorce, immigration, poverty, mental or physical illness, and children's choices. Regardless of the factors that result in mothers living apart from their children, at least three reasons make it important that, as feminists, we address their invisibility. First, their voices should be included if we are truly to understand the many experiences of women's lives. Second, until these women garner visibility and understanding they will remain disempowered and unable to either speak for themselves or negotiate changes in their lived experiences. Third, their powerlessness, in all likelihood, adds cumulatively to other women's marginalisation and powerlessness producing

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[2] Sandra Pollack, "Preface" to *Woman Defined Motherhood*, Jane Price Knowles & Ellen Cole, eds. (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1990), xvii.

a synergistic effect that increases the disempowerment every woman encounters.[3] Researching and writing about some of their experiences will begin to fill one gap in our knowledge about women's lives, help normalise their lives, and enable us to respect them as mothers. This may initiate societal change.

My research is conducted within the feminist theoretical framework that acknowledges that it is possible to initiate societal change at either the individual or group level to reduce people's disempowerment and marginalisation.[4] By making the experiences of mothers who live apart from their children more accessible, my research begins to identify the sub-components of the generally accepted beliefs and values that form the stereotypes held about these mothers in particular and about all mothers in general. Developing awareness by making peoples' lived experiences and voices visible and audible is one process that changes how society responds to them. It is this awareness that creates a social climate that alters the stereotypes commonly held about a group of people and the attributions made about them. As feminists we can then use this knowledge to begin dismantling those beliefs that are incongruent with our vision of egalitarian communities.

My personal experience supports the importance of increasing the agency of mothers who live apart from their children and contributes to my interest in their invisibility as mothers. First, academic study has taught me the importance of each woman's voice in defining the overall experience of women. Second, my earlier experiences with the

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[3] John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits* (New York: Basic Books, 1995) provides an analysis regarding how our society is diminished when we marginalise some members of our community.

[4] See Janice L. Ristock & Joan Pennel, *Community Research as Empowerment: Feminist Links, Postmodern Interruptions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods From The Margins* (Toronto, Garamond Press, 1989).

childbirth education group taught me that, working as a team, people can create awareness and negotiate changes in oppressive structures or systems. Third, I too lost my status as a mother. My loss resulted, however, from my first child's death by accidental drowning whereas my participants lost their status as mothers when they began to live apart from their children. Fourth, in my interactions with community groups that work with marginalised individuals I learned that each person's contribution to society is necessary if society is to remain healthy and vibrant. Finally, as a feminist I believe in the equality of all individuals. I also believe that it is necessary to challenge the hierarchical structures that deny certain people the right to participate as equals in our communities and the right to name their own lived experiences.

My belief that each of my participants or co-researchers is my peer, or equal, influenced how I developed and wrote my thesis. This belief evolved as a result of my involvement with feminism, my community, and potential participants. Two of my friends live apart from their children. One became a participant and both played an integral part in helping me develop my research topic and my interview probes.[5] All of my co-researchers collaborated in the research process by sharing sensitive areas of their lives, providing valuable insights, and setting me back on the right track if they felt I was missing important details in my analysis.

Chapter 1, "Exploring the Existing Literature," suggests that the role of mother-hood is socially constructed. In this chapter I begin to develop the scaffolding to explore my topic, "Mothers Without Their Children" in a feminist context. I review a few non-western cultures' beliefs about mothers who live apart from their children as well as our western

[5] See Sulamit Reinharz, "Feminist Action Research," in *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181, for an analysis of participatory or collaborative research.

cultural heritage of how mothers' roles evolved, and how stereotypes affect how we view people.

Chapter 2, "Theoretical Background and Methodology," explores further the feminist framework within which I conducted my research. It explains the theoretical background for feminist participatory research including Grounded Methodology and Feminist Standpoint Theory. This chapter also explains the process I followed in conducting my research.

Chapter 3, "In Their Own Words," introduces my co-researchers and tells the story of how they came to live apart from their children and how they feel about this separation in their own words. It also discusses issues of friendship between the principal researcher and co-researchers.

Chapter 4, "Women of Courage and Agency: Mothers Who Live Apart From Their Children," examines both the marginalisation of mothers who live apart from their children and their resistance to it. It also provides a more detailed analysis of a mother's role when she lives apart from her children as well as my personal insights as a researcher.

Chapter 5, "Discussion of My Findings and Their Implications," reviews the themes I developed during my research and discusses suggestions for further research and areas of public policy that may benefit from a review in light of my research findings.

CHAPTER ONE

EXPLORING THE EXISTING LITERATURE

My literature review reveals that many feminists are working toward reducing the oppression of mothers. For example, feminists have organised and attended conferences such as "Woman-Defined Motherhood: A Conference for Therapists" that was held in September 1988 at Goddard College, Plainflield, Vermont, and resulted in an edited book by Jane Price Knowles and Ellen Cole.[1] Other feminists, such as Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, a developmental psychologist, Christine Everigham, a sociologist, and Katherine Arnup, an historian, have published books with case studies about different types of mothers including lesbians, woman of colour, and women with disabilities.[2]

Martha McMahon states, "motherhood is an unsettling issue for feminist analysis."[3] It is indeed an unsettling issue! Feminist analysis and texts increasingly include, however, studies of reproduction, birth, maternal thinking, and women's different voices about motherhood. Feminists' increased interest in motherhood has been happening, as Martha McMahon points out by paraphrasing Heather Jon Maroney (1986), because "the analysis of motherhood . . . . has the potential to challenge not just the political order but the deeper cultural images of human nature and the links between society and nature on which the social and political order rests."[4] My thesis research adds to the feminist agenda of

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[1] Jane Price Knowles & Ellen Cole, eds.. "Preface" to *Woman Defined Motherhood* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1990), xvii.

[2] Christine Everigham, *Motherhood and Modernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, *Mothers' Images of Motherhood: Case Studies of Twelve Mothers* (London: Routledge, 1992); Katherine Arnup, *Lesbian Parenting: Living with Pride & Prejudice* (Charlottetown: gynergy books, 1995).

[3] Martha McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women's Lives* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1995), 8.

[4] Ibid., 7.

challenging our social and political system by studying a group of women whose motherhood is typically not acknowledged – those who do not have custody of their children.

As feminists, we can investigate the lives of mothers who do not have custody of or live with their children from various perspectives. For example, Phyllis Chesler, a psychologist, and Susan Boyd, a law professor,[5] have studied the custody cases of such women in relation to marital dissolution. Both authors explore the situations of mothers who have lost custody of their children after marital break-up and demonstrate that some judges habitually devalue mothers in relation to fathers. They also show how mediation settlements, which presume that each partner has approximately the same power, frequently reflect the historical imbalance of power in relationships.[6]

One area of inquiry that the Phyllis Chesler and Susan Boyd touch on only briefly and that appears to have been mostly overlooked by other researchers is motherhood from the perspective of mothers who live apart from their children. Neglecting this area of inquiry prevents us from benefiting from their knowledge and unique input about different types of mothers and the roles they play in our social system. Thus, studying mothers who live apart from their children has the potential to increase our understanding of motherhood by providing us with new knowledge about their experiences and feelings as mothers who do not fit our culture's norm of a mother.

Feminist scholars agree that in our culture "mother" is the role assigned to a female parent caring for her children, and it is a social category whose current definition

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[5] Phyllis Chesler, *Mothers On Trial: The Battle for Children & Custody* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1986); Susan B. Boyd, "Child Custody, Ideologies, and Employment," *Canadian Journal of Woman and Law* 3, no.1 (1989): 111-133.

[6] Phylis Chesler, "A Contemporary Overview," in *Mothers on Trial*, 26-48: Susan B. Boyd, Ibid., 132.

needs to be examined in light of past and contemporary cultures.[7] Feminists scientists have developed and advanced various theories about how mothering evolved and is maintained. Nancy Chodorow theorizes, for example, that women are taught and persuaded to mother through a socialisation process that includes psychological pressure.[8] In the late 1970s, her theories challenged those of some social scientists who believed motherhood was determined by biological facts and not a role determined by society's needs.[9] In taking up the argument of socialisation versus biology she was revisiting the same struggle as did earlier feminists. One example is Maltilda Joslyn Gage's (1826-1898) work that showed "womens [sic] rights did not centre around women's worthiness and their ability to show themselves 'responsible' in male terms but around men's reluctance to allow woman freedom and responsibility for their own lives."[10] A second example is Mary Ritter Beard's (1876-1958) thesis that written history fails to include women's stories and information about their roles and contributions or how tradition rather than biology determines their available choices.[11] The latter author's work was a forerunner of, and shared the philosophy of many of, today's feminist historians, such as Gerda Lerner and Judith Zinsser.[12]

Mothering in Other Cultures

How women parent differs across cultures. Different cultures also have different ideologies about when, if, and with whom it is appropriate for children to live apart from

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[7] Nancy Chodorow, "Why Women Mother," in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkely: Universtiy of California Press, 1978), 14; Martha McMahon, Ibid., 7.
[8] Nancy Chodorow, Ibid., 211.
[9] Ibid., 14.
[10] Lynn Spender, "Maltilda Joslyn Gage: Active Intellectual," in Dale Spender ed., *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 139.
[11] Ann J. Lane, "Mary Ritter Beard: Women as Force," in Dale Spender, Ibid 333-347, and Judith P. Zinsser, *History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 31-34.
[12] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarachy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Judith P. Zinsser, Ibid.

their mothers. The examples that follow illustrate three different cultures' ideologies about mothers living apart from their children.

The first example is the Nisga'a and Coast Tsimshian Nations, which inhabit the northernmost coastal regions of British Columbia. Group maintenance of family ties and friendships are of primary importance to them. Traditionally, the women had sexual equality with men and were not censured for leaving their husbands. Their families protected them by not permitting abuse; the women worked as a team caring for their children and providing sustenance for their community. Child-care arrangements were flexible and allowed women to participate in productive and reproductive work.[13]

Today the Nisga'a and Coast Tsimshian Nations in British Columbia are minority cultures living within a dominant culture based on Western European influences. The members of these Nations receive contradictory messages about what are socially acceptable child-care strategies.[14] This occurs because their lifestyles frequently do not conform to the dominant culture's expectation. Rather, members of these nations continue to be influenced by their own cultures. Jo-Anne Fiske remarks that:

> extended families, whether sharing a common household or otherwise, were [in the 1960's through 1980's] the most stable economic unit. . . .Collective responsibility for childcare, for example, allowed women to pursue wage employment and education away from their communities. Similarly, pooling a range of subsistence goods and cash mean that women who were absent from seasonal subsistence production, whether they resided elsewhere permanently or only occasionally, could expect to share essential domestic provisions.[15]

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[13]Carol Cooper, "Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast: An Historical Perspective, 1830-1900," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1992-3): 44-75.

[14]Marlee Kline, "Complicating the Ideology of Motherhood: Child Welfare Law and First Nation Women," *Queens Law Journal* 2 (1993): 307-342, provides a good explanation of the competing messages First Nation women receive about caring for children.

[15] Jo-Anne Fiske, "Political Status of Native Indian Women: Contradictory Implications of Canadian State Policy," in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 19 no. 2 (1995): 9.

An example of this is the exchange of goods between my friend, a First Nation's woman, and her parents. When they came to visit her they brought her treats such as eulachons[16] and dried seaweed. In return, she shared fruit from her farm. In addition to sharing food, her parents also participated in their culture's collective responsibility for child rearing; on their visits they brought along those grandchildren whom they were raising and of whom they had custody.

My second example of a different culture's child-care strategies comes from Thailand. Kerry Richter's research indicates that, although the trend is changing, having children live with relatives is still a preference. Traditionally, some children lived apart from their mothers. This method was used to strengthen extended family connections and ensure that needed resources were shared between family members. Today, mothers who are unable to live with their children still prefer that a relative cares for their child(ren) rather than a nonrelative.[17]

My final example is about mothers in Africa and mothers of African descent in the United States. Antonio McDaniel's and S. Philip Morgan's research demonstrates that African-American mothers live apart from their children more frequently than do mothers in other ethnic groups and that this living arrangement is similar to that in Africa.[18] They state that:

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[16] Eulachon is a fish of the North Pacific that comes up the rivers to spawn just after the ice has left. It was used as dried and fresh food by the First Nations and white people alike in Terrace during the 1950's when I was a child. It was also used by some white people in the Vancouver area from the 1890's to the 1950's, and according to my mother-in-law was sold in Woodward's grocery stores around the 1940's. Eulachons are described in G.C.Carl, W.A. Clemens, and C.C. Lindsey, *The Fresh-water Fishes of British Columbia* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1967), 34-35.

[17] Kerry Richter, "Living Separately as a Child-Care Strategy: Implications for Women's Work and Family in Urban Thailand," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58 (May 1996): 327-339.

[18] Antonio McDaniel and S. Philip Morgan, "Racial Difference in Mother-Child Coresidence in the Past," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (November 1996): 1011-1017.

> The prevalence of children not living with parents in contemporary Africa cannot be accounted for by crisis fostering. Further ethnographic work in Africa shows that sending children to live elsewhere is positively sanctioned in particular cases. . . . [such as] when the children will benefit from living with a relative who can provide better access to schools. . . . At a broader level the shared raising of children is a way of strengthening, maintaining, and acknowledging extended family ties.[19]

In these three cultures, the norm is collective responsibility for child-care which promotes maintenance of the kin group and the sharing of needed resources. Similarly, some of our own First Nations cultures enable mothers to meet their own needs for education and employment while ensuring their children are cared for.

How Did Mothers' Roles Evolve?

While "Scientific Mothering" is discussed less frequently today than in the past, it is still very much part of our culture. It originated at the turn of the twentieth century and brought the results of scientific research to child-rearing. Katherine Arnup states that the goal of scientific mothering was the production of "workers suited to the regime of the industrial workplace." The focus of 'scientific child rearing' during this initial phase was developing correct behaviour patterns through repetition of activities at fixed intervals. Women were advised that the method to achieve this was to learn and use Frederick Taylor's newly discovered techniques of scientific management to parent their children.[20] The assumption by many people around this time was that if scientific management could improve industrial production it could also improve human reproduction.[21]

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[19] Ibid., 1012.

[20] Katherine Arnup, "'Bringing up Baby': The Care and Feeding of Infants and Young Children," in *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 85.

[21] Shari L. Thurer, "Fall from Grace: Twentieth-Century Mom," in *The Myths of Motherhood: How culture Reinvents The Good Mother* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 226, 235.

To understand the zeitgeist that encouraged the introduction of Scientific Mothering at the turn of the twentieth century as a method of controlling how women parent, it is necessary to examine what preconditions led to its emergence. Before the industrial revolution, the majority of the goods consumed were produced at home. Most children worked beside their parents in the production of goods to meet the family's needs. The kin group and later the family was the economic unit of production.[22]

Mechanisation and break-up of the feudal states was a gradual process of transformation. Eventually the ideology of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother gave way to the view that the earth should be dominated, conquered, and suppressed.[23] About the seventeenth century Carolyn Merchant stated:

> Symbolically associated with unruly nature was the dark side of woman. . . . women were also seen as closer to nature than men, subordinate in the social hierarchy to the men of their class, and imbued with a far greater sexual passion. The upheavals of the Reformation and the witch trials of the sixteenth century heightened these perceptions. Like wild chaotic nature, women needed to be subdued and kept in their place.[24]

Gender roles became more defined and motherhood began to be idealised as a woman's primary occupation.[25] Science and politics which previously had been conducted primarily from domestic surroundings such as the French 'salon' and the home laboratory began to be institutionalised in Europe around the time of the French revolution in 1789.[26] This period was as Pina G. Abir-am and Dorinda Outram state:

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[22] Shari L. Thurer, The Exaltation of Mother: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Mom, Ibid, 183.
[23] Carolyn Merchant, "The Death of Nature," in *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 76.
[24] Carolyn Merchant, "Nature as Disorder: Women and Witches," in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980; Harper & Row 1986), 132.
[25] Shari L. Thurer, "The Exaltation of Mother: 18th and 19th Century Mom," Ibid., 185.
[26] Dominique Godineau, "Daughters of Liberty and Revolutionary Citizens" in Geneviè Fraisse & Michelle Perrot eds., *A History of Women in the West: IV. Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 16; Pnina Abir-am & Dorinda Outram eds., "Introduction" to *Uneasy Careers & Intimate Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutger University Press, 1987), 4.

> a period of crucial developments not only in the social organisation of science, but also of that of the family in Western Europe and North America. It was in this period, too, that a crucial dichotomy, the establishment of a cultural and institutional polarity between public and private worlds, came to affect science [and politics].[27]

Mothers, at least those of the middle and upper classes, appear to have been left to control their own homes and had authority to educate their own children.[28] Meanwhile, the former peasants, now landless, tried to eke out a living: mothers worked, children were left unattended, children worked, and mothers and children entered the poorhouse together. Mortality was high.[29]

European cities began to respond by establishing maternal and infant care as a method of increasing their populations. In keeping with this population enhancement through "biopolitics," beginning in the eighteenth century the German-speaking world transferred motherhood back, at least partially, into the public realm.[30] The western world's public interest in mothering issues had two results that feminists later used to their advantage. First, it set the stage for state interventions around child-rearing practises. Second, it separated motherhood from religious duty thus affirming its social construction.[31] Barred from direct involvement in the public sphere, the British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft [32] (1759-1797) and the German feminist Amalie Holst[33] (1758-1829) used the space these beliefs created to advance their cause. They argued that mothers needed a good education

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[27]Ibid.,
[28] Shari L. Thurer, Ibid., 197.
[29] Ibid., 201.
[30] Ann Taylor Allen, "From Authority to Nurture: Theoretical Origins of Maternal Feminism, 1780-1840," in *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany 1800-1914* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 17.
[31] Ibid., 17-22.
[32] Miriam Brody, "Mary Wollstonecraft: Sexuality and Women's Right (1759-1797)," in Dale Spender, Ibid., 41; Joseph Johnson, "On National Education," in Ashley Tauchert ed., *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of The Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (Vermont: Everyman, 1995), 189.
[33]Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid., 31, states Amalie Holst published her only known work, *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur Höhern Geistesbilding* ("On the Capacity of Women for Higher Education") in 1802, and http://kvk.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/hylib-bi (02/07/99 8:39 PM).

and the right to make decisions in the best interest of their children if they were to educate and raise them to be morally and socially responsible adults. Mary Wollstonecraft said that:

> The rearing of children, that is, the laying a foundation of sound health both of body and mind in the rising generation, has justly been insisted on as the peculiar destination of woman, the ignorance that incapacitates them must be contrary to the order of things. And I contend that their minds can take in much more, and ought to do so, or they will never become sensible mothers. . . . how many children are absolutely murdered by the ignorance of women! [34]

Her work as well as the activism of other feminists gained women some rights to be publicly involved in child-management issues.[35]

Public Motherhood and the beginning of our social network began in the German speaking world and other culturally associated communities around the early 1800's with women's participation in charitable work.[36] German aristocratic and middle class women ran and maintained pre-schools for all children, voluntarily visited and helped families in crisis, and participated in associations to help the poor. Volunteering in the public sphere provided these women with opportunities to develop friendships, recognise their abilities, and develop an agenda for reforming male domination in the home.[37] Through this work, they also developed skills in the areas of administration, finance, communication, and research.[38]

Immediately following the revolutionary period of 1848-1849, in which feminists as well as other groups initiated social change throughout the German states, the liberals or wealthier classes formed reactionary groups and attempted to restore the previous status quo of patriarchal rule.[39] Instead of abandoning their agenda in this period (1850-1858) German

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[34] Joseph Johnson, Ibid., 217.
[35] Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid., 23.
[36] Michell Perrot, "Stepping Out," in Geneviève Fraisse & Michelle Perrot eds., Ibid, 451.
[37] Ann Taylor Allen, "The Personal and the Political: Social Origins of Maternal Feminism, 1800-1848," Ibid., 51.
[38]. Michell Perrot, Ibid., 451.
[39] Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid., 58; Ann Taylor Allen, "The Great Social Household: The Kindergarten and Women's Mission, 1850-1864," in Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid., 79.

feminists continued their fight by taking advantage of the ambiguities in the liberals' philosophies.[40] During the same time period, throughout most of Western Europe and the United States, women fought for their right to participate in the social sphere and contribute to the national family with varying amounts of success.[41]

Gradually eugenics' goal of improving "the biological quality of human populations through the application of the science of heredity"[42] came to be accepted and motherhood was identified as a purely biological role. Mothers were advised to consult their physicians for advice on child rearing and development.[43] In response, theorists such as the Swedish feminist Ellen Key, (1849-1926) argued that, "the relationship between mother and child contains the origins of those customs and beliefs through which the altruistic and sympathetic feelings of humanity are developed to a new strength and a greater extent."[44] Two German feminists, Helene Simon (1862-1947) and Adele Gerhard (1868-1959), influenced by Ellen Key stated in their book that "the 'spiritual power that is expressed through the devotion and strength of motherly influence' could not be reproduced by a hireling."[45]

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an American feminist, (1815-1902) and Hedwig Dohm, a German feminist, (1833-1919) did not agree with Ellen Key. They argued against her

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[40] Ibid., 79.
[41] Jane Errington, "Pioneers and Suffragists," in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, Lindsay Dorney ed., *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1993), 77.
[42] Ann Taylor Allen, "Motherhood, Culture, and Evolution: Some New Perspectives, 1890-1914," Ibid., 157.
[43] Ann Taylor Allen, "Motherhood as Choice: The Campaign for Reproductive Rights, 1908-1914, Ibid., 203
[44] Cited from Ann Taylor Allen, "Motherhood, Culture, and Evolution," Ibid., 161, original quote from Ellen Key, *Missbrauchte Frauenkraft: Ein Essay* (1st ed., 1898; reprinted Berlin, 1911), 23.
[45] Cited from Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid., 165, original quote from Helene Simon & Adele Gerhard, *Mutterschaft und Geistige Arbeit* (Berlin, G.Reimer, 1901), 6-7, and http://fclibr.library.umass.edu?search?as...2, E/frameset&asimon+helene+1862+1947&2,,2 (01/07/99 8:50 PM).

belief that a biological mother was the best person to raise her child. For example, Ann Taylor Allen states that:

> [Hedwig] Dohm gently ridiculed authors such as Key, Gerhard, and Simon and their reverential cult of mother-love. Motherhood, she insisted, did not automatically confer sainthood. Many mothers were exceedingly unqualified parents, and children were often better off in the hands of trained child-care workers. . . . [using] the best and most scientific principles.[46]

Most people did not agree with Hedwig Dohm's suggestions. Her comments, however, together with a declining birth rate, high infant mortality, and an abundance of sickly infants pointed to motherhood as "a major key to a healthy population."[47] Mothers, or rather poor maternal training and a lack of breast-feeding, were blamed. While state intervention through the introduction of scientific practices reduced infant mortality and improved the health of infants, it also reduced mothers' control over child rearing.[48]

Some European and North American feminists, while supporting state assistance for infants, also advocated for mothers' rights. The acceptance, however, of the racist and classist philosophies of the eugenics movement by many feminists rather than the more liberal policies of equality which feminists had supported in the past set a dangerous precedent. It encouraged the belief that the dominant middle class was the ideal, and that women from it should help other groups to achieve the same standards of child-rearing. It also encouraged the belief that state intervention with scientific principles was needed to improve the quality of humans produced.[49] These two beliefs effectively created a space for

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[46] Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid, 168, paraphrasing Hedwig Dohm, *Die Mutter* (Berlin, 1903); Renate Duelli-Klein, "Hedwig Dohm: Passionate Theorist," in Dale Spender(ed.), Ibid.,, 174, also presents Hedwig Dohm's thesis that "not every woman ... should be by nature a gifted mother."

[47] Jeffrey Weeks, "The Population Question in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Sex, Politics & Society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981), 127.

[48] Ibid., & Ann Taylor Allen, Ibid., 177.

[49] Ann Taylor Allen, "Motherhood as Choice," Ibid., 188-205.

individuals of authority or experts allowing them to "enter the picture," thus reducing mothers' agency and introducing scientific mothering.

The introduction of Scientific Motherhood, as mothering using scientific principles was called, followed closely on the heels of the introduction of Scientific Management (1880-1920) and home maintenance's transformation into a domestic science.[50] At about this time 'experts' took on the task of deciding the best method to raise children, just as they took over as professional researchers from so-called amateurs in most of the other sciences, such as biology, chemistry, and astronomy.[51] Women lost their right to participate as equals with the men in the new science – specifically, they lost ground in their struggle to gain the right to make decisions affecting their own and their children's lives.

Scientific motherhood "required that mothers . . . read and follow the advice of scientifically trained experts"[52] Researchers in the new science of psychology offered mothers scientific principles to help them raise better citizens. The first direct intervention by psychology was John B. Watson's behavioural or regulatory approach to child raising. He wrote, "give me a dozen healthy infants . . . and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select."[53] After the Second World War, the behavioural approach was jettisoned, for the permissive approach. The one constant was that it was a mother's fault if her child did not become a responsible adult.[54] Mothers were advised not to attempt any moulding of the child[55] and were relegated to the role of assistants

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[50] Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 146.
[51] Ibid., 150; Clarisa W. Atkinson, "Motherhood Reformed: The Parson's Wife and Her Children," in *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991) 199; Pnina Abir-am & Dorinda Outram, Ibid., 3.
[52] Shari L. Thurer, "Fall from Grace: Twentieth-Century Mom," Ibid., 235.
[53] Ibid., 236
[54] Ibid., 278-279.
[55] Ibid., 191.

who meticulously made charts and left their interpretation to the experts.[56] "On top of the prescribed additions to mom's job duties, there was a prescription for her inner state. From now on, she was expected to be fulfilled by mothering."[57]

The 1960s heralded the advent of contemporary feminism. Concurrently, feminists began critiquing the "impossible psychic demands heaped on mothers ... [and] motherhood [as] one of the major institutions that oppressed women and prevented them from taking more active control of their lives."[58] They wrote 'antimotherhood tracts' such as Shulamit Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Ellen Peck's *The Baby Trap* (1971).[59] Many other women, including myself, were involved at a grass-roots level in birthing groups such as The Boston Women's Health Collective and Mission Childbirth Education Association whose focus was "natural childbirth" and mother-controlled birthing. We accepted the ideology of motherhood and did not realise the incongruencies within it and with our own independence until after our children were born. Some of us found that our careers and children did not mix, others attempted to be superwomen and maintain their involvement in the workforce. Feminist such as Andrienne Rich revised our understanding of mother's oppression and found "patriarchy to be the oppressor, and not motherhood, which is only a product of patriarchy."[60]

During the 1960s Betty Friedan began mapping "the territory of women's discontent in contemporary times" in her book *The Feminine Mystique.* Her work established the "basis and parameters of the modern version of 'the woman question' [or] . . .

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[56] Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, "The Psychodynamics of the Family," in Ibid., 197.
[57] Shari L. Thurer, Ibid., 256
[58] Ibid., 265.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

'a problem without a name'" as we understand it today. "The problem without a name" was the belief that "women . . . were supposed to be content and fulfilled (and were 'sick' if they were not)." 'Sick' referred to the short-sighted conclusion by society that a woman's discontentment with her role was a result of internal deficiencies.[61] Because the previous history of feminists had been forgotten, Betty Friedan reconstructed, "The knowledge that women's disenchantment, sense of emptiness, was a realistic and rational response to the circumstances in which they found themselves, and far from finding deficiencies in themselves, they would be well advised to take a closer look at the circumstances."[62] Her work was the precursor of what is today commonly referred to as 'the second wave of feminism.' Her theory that it is our social system rather than individual deficiencies that cause disenchantment with one's life, was instrumental in helping me analyse my data. It challenged me to identify the factors in their social environments that resulted in the women's experiences as mothers rather than attempting to find pathologies in them or their reactions to the experiences.

Mothering Here and Now

The commonly accepted history of how motherhood evolved has resulted in the beliefs that biology equips women to be mothers, women never fought for equal parenting rights with their children's fathers, and women are unable to parent effectively without professional advice. This ideology was formed and is maintained in Western society by a system that writes history from the perspective of white men in power and privileges the view that maintains their control. Consequently, our culture's norms and the social roles

[61] Dale Spender, "Modern Feminist Theorists: Reinventing Rebellion," in Dale Spender, Ibid., 367
[62] Ibid.

individuals are assigned are also incorporated into history.[63] These norms imply that a mother's role is to assume full responsibility for child-care and specify what duties she is expected to perform in this role. Mothers are judged 'good' if they are unselfish and meet all their children's needs and bad if they cannot meet all their children's needs. The latter judgement frequently does not acknowledge the reality that many mothers have insufficient resources or power to meet their children's needs. If these mothers attempt to voice complaints about the system, their voices are silenced with threats of being judged irresponsible or unfit mothers.[64] In addition, as my history of mothering shows, this ideology is not accurate. Women resisted erosion of their rights in the past and, as Figure 1 indicates, they are still doing so today.

The ideology about motherhood is, as Dorothy Smith states, supported by "the enormous literature on the relation of family socialisation and educational attainment, in which the role of the mother takes on such a prominent part."[65] In our culture, when a woman becomes a new mother she is enculturated into the practices of scientific motherhood. For example, pamphlets and publications for new parents, visits by the health nurse (the community's representative), and advertisements for baby products are usually targeted at mothers because it is assumed that they will be their child's primary care provider. The pressure to conform and meet society's expectations of how to be a good mother are hard to resist and most women acquiesce to them.[66]

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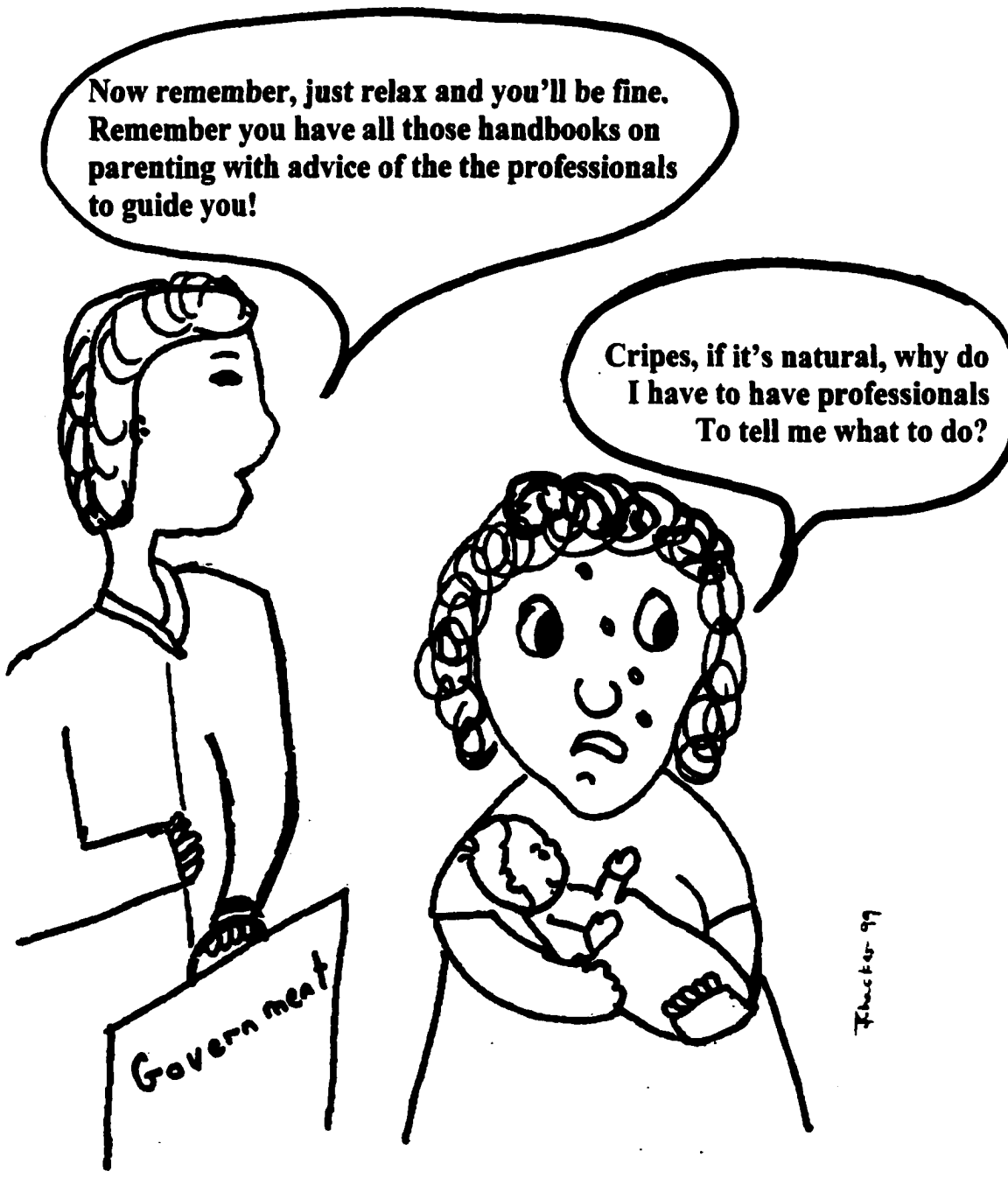
[63] Judith P. Zinsser, "Traditional Histories," in Ibid., 3-15.

[64] The following authors address the incongruencies in mothers' roles and what happens when mothers speak up. Jane Swigart, "The Fear of Knowing," *The Myth of the Bad Mother* (New York: Avon Books, 1991) 91-109; Kathy Weingarten, *The Mother's Voice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994) 1-83, 209-215.

[65] Dorothy E. Smith, "A Peculiar Eclipsing: Women's Exclusion from Man's Culture," *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 21.

[66] Jill Julius Matthews, "Management of the Gender Order," in *Good And Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Feminity in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 99-103.

Figure 1: "If its natural, I don't want anyone telling me how to do it."[67]



[67] Jill Matthews, "Mothering," in *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Feminitiy in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 175.

When I began my research and was looking for mothers willing to participate as co-researchers, my casual conversations with members of the general public and professional caregivers surprised me. They did not recognise living apart from one's children as just another child-care strategy. The generally stated view was that women without their children would be bad mothers, likely on welfare, and probably substance abusers. These stereotypes are likely maintained because in Canada and the United States the most readily available research about mothers without their children is about those with the previously mentioned characteristics. Here are two examples of current literature available about these mothers.

The first study is "Impact of Maternal Alcoholism on Separation of Children From Their Mothers: Findings From a Sample of Incarcerated Women" by Margaret E. Goldberg, et al. (1996). It examines the co-residence among twenty-five alcoholic women incarcerated for drunk driving, looks at drinking patterns for the mothers and their partners, as well as the mother's sexual and reproductive behaviour, work history, and socio-demographic background. It also looks at patterns of children's and mother's residence and what the children's living arrangements were when they were not living with their mother. The study shows that only eight out of twenty-two mothers in the study were living with their children immediately before their incarceration. The main finding of the study was that extended separations for a mother from her children were associated with her level of dependency on alcohol (degree & length) and her oldest child's age. This study provides a thorough examination of the appropriateness of the child-protective placements. It is less thorough in presenting the preconditions that led to the mother's drinking or substance use

and states that in most instances the research did not indicate conclusively which event, separation from their children or substance abuse, came first.[68]

A second study, by Susan Zuravin and Geofrey Grief (1989), "Low-Income Mothers Without Custody: Who are They and Where Are Their Children?" looks at eight mothers who lost custody of their children during the previous seventeen months. The cohort group for the study is 518 urban mothers on financial assistance, who had low education and little work experience. Compared to those mothers who did not lose custody of their children the eight that did had more mental health problems, including depression, and substance abuse problems. The study shows that neglectful mothers with mental health issues such as depression were more likely to get sicker and have their children placed in some form of foster care than are mothers on financial assistance including those who had a previous history of abusing their children.[69] The researchers posed the question were "sufficient services [being provided] soon enough to these families" or were the mothers being left to manage until their "mental health problems [had] deteriorated to the point where they [were] virtually intractable?"[70] I too wonder what would have happened if more resources were available to help these mothers?

The information I have presented thus far about our cultural heritage[71] and the research concerning motherhood is an example of the data available to members of our society. It is the data used when we develop our schemas and stereotypes about mothering

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[68] Margaret E. Goldberg, Barbara W. Lex, Nancy K. Mello, Jack H Mendelson, Tommie A. Bower, 'Impact of Maternal Alcoholism on Separation of Children From Their Mothers: Findings From a Sample of Incarcerated Women," in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 66 no. 2 (1996): 228-238.

[69] Susan Zuravin & Geoffrey Greif, "Low-Income Mothers Without Custody: Who Are They and Where Are Their Children?" in *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 16 (1989): 163-180.

[70] Ibid., 176.

[71] "Our cultural heritage," "our western culture," or "our society," etc. throughout my thesis refers to cultures such as our Canadian one that have been strongly influenced by the social ideologies of Western Europe such as the scientific method, industrialisation, and so forth.

and mothers who live apart from their children. It is part of the available information that contributes to the maps or plans that each of us develops that enable us to make sense of the relationship among the parts of our social environment or culture. Our maps help us organise seemingly unconnected stimuli associated with the social and physcial environment humans have created. Communication between individuals and groups requires that we share a common understanding of how our culture operates. This shared knowledge usually includes the beliefs and values of what role each category of people is assigned to perform.[72]

Unfortunately, the three categories of gender, race, and class frequently form the basis of role assignments. Our socialisation works to inculcate our acceptance of our roles and their associated stereotypical behaviours. This occurs because our behaviour is reinforced or sanctioned to the degree that it conforms to, or differs from, the accepted behaviour norms of our assigned roles. Reinforcement and sanctions act as regulators to produce, maintain, and eliminate behaviours with respect to the role expectations for a particular person or group of persons.[73]

Patriarchy, as it is practised in our culture, is the structure "created by men in order to sustain and recreate male power and female subordination. Such structures include . . . [the] socialisation process to ensure that women and men develop behaviour and belief systems appropriate to the powerful or less powerful groups to which they belong."[74] This socialisation usually results in both those with and without power believing in the legitimacy of the power. It results in a form of polarisation in which those individuals in power "look

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[72] Jim E. Alcock, D. W. (Bill) Carment, & Stan W. Sadava, "Social Perception and Cognition," in *A Textbook of Social Psychology 3rd ed.* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada Inc., 1994), 62-105. This chapter provides an introduction to schema formation.

[73] William B. Gudykunst, "Understanding Group Differences," in *Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication, 2nd ed.* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 37.

[74] Robyn Rowland and Renate Klein, "Radical Feminism: History, Politics, Action," in Diane Bell & Renate Klein, *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1996) 15.

out for their own interest and have little or no concern for others' interests."[75] In reality they do not even recognise that other people are marginalised or have so little agency that they are unable to meet their own needs.

People are marginalised when they live on the 'margins' of society or far away from the centres of power and control where their voices are not heard and their experiences are denied. As stated by Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna:

> The margin refers to the context in which those who suffer injustice, inequality and exploitation live their lives. Knowledge production is also organised so that the views of a small group of people are presented as 'The Truth.' The majority of people are excluded from participating as either producers or participants in the creation of knowledge.[76]

What is accepted as knowledge influences its creation and also what is understood as reality. As Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna put forth, "most of us have not had the opportunity to research, to create knowledge which is rooted in and representative of [our] experience. We have been excluded from participating in, describing and analysing our own understanding of reality."[77] This results in our women's and especially marginalised women's experiences being denied or not acknowledged. When marginalised people's experiences go unacknowledged and their interpretations are denied, their knowledge is, as I discuss in Chapter 2, not included in the formation of our culture's beliefs, ideologies, and history, and their agency is reduced.

Agency is the ability or power to make decisions based on one's own needs and desires in matters that primarily affect oneself. It is, as Lorraine Code states, the

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[75] Gudykunst, "Communicating With Strangers," Ibid., 2.
[76] Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, "Forward," to *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (Toronto: Gramond Press, 1989), 7.
[77] Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, "Introduction," to Ibid., 16.

"possibilit[y] for effective, independent action."[78] Agency empowers individuals to control the events in their own lives free of other people's excessive control or unwarranted social constraints. Agency through empowerment provides access to the power necessary to obtain needed resources. In our western culture, patriarchy specifies how agency is assigned. It is based on the ideology that gives some individuals (white males in power) the right to dominate other individuals (females, the less affluent, and people of colour), to organise our society's structure, and control the means of production. The less agency a person is given by the ideology, the lower his/her rank in the class, gender, racial hierarchy and the less agency a person in that particular role has to control his or her means of production or to access the resources (s)he requires to sustain his or herself.[79]

In the western world, the role of mother is assigned to a particular gender category -- women. The role a mother is expected to fulfill as a parent and the agency she is given, is defined within the context of her gender category. Class, race, and gender effect how her other roles are interpreted and what options she has to fulfill them.[80] Two problems may arise for her when the generally accepted beliefs about a group of people she is a member of are too narrow and her actual experiences are not acknowledged. First, it limits her available options. For a mother who lives separate from her child(ren) this may prevent her from meeting her children's and her own needs. Second, and definitely more problematic, it may cause her to exhibit unhealthy behaviours. In this case, as my quote from

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[78] Lorraine Code, "Chapter One: How Do We Know? Questions of Method in Feminist Practice," in Sandra Burt & Lorraine Code, eds *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995), 27.

[79] Dorothy E. Smith, "A Sociology for Women" Ibid., 54-56. Her work provides an excellent analysis of power assigned to particular social classes.

[80] Anne Bishop, "Step 2: Understanding Different Oppressions," in *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1994), 64.

Betty Friedan on page 19 suggests, the behaviour should not be attributed to the individual but rather to the circumstances or social systems that brought it forth.

Chapter two begins by briefly highlighting some of the theories about our social system or the structures that serve to control how our communities function. It then goes on to describe the specific theories and methods I used to conduct my research. It also provides insights into why feminists do research that includes women's voices from the margins and how they obtain their data.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

Philosophical debates such as those put forth by Simone de Beauvoir support the argument that tradition rather than biology determines how the social world is organised.[1] Many factors contribute to the beliefs and values that determine what social structure our culture embraces and why, as the dominant group or dominated group, we accept this system. Activists such as Paulo Freire, Donna Haraway, and bell hooks challenge us to assess our values and beliefs and develop ones more congruent with a world that works for all of the earth's inhabitants.[2] They appear to share Anne Bishop's dream of "a world based on co-operation, negotiation, and universal respect for the innate value of every creature on earth and the Earth herself."[3] The theories that these activists have developed point to our culture's social structure as the problem and help us to understand how it results in oppression for some people. Theories do not, however, change prejudice and discrimination by themselves. Research that exposes specific forms of discrimination and develops methods to transform the systems that maintain it are necessary to effect change.[4]

Socialisation is the process whereby we learn what behaviour or response is appropriate for our gender and position in our community. It includes the processes we use to organise our experiences with our social and natural environments into theories. These

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[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), xv-xxiv.
[2] See Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, eds. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (London: Routledge, 1993), Donna Haraway, Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science (New York: Routledge, 1989), and bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt & Co.,1995), for examples of activists working towards ending racism and sexism.
[3] Anne Bishop, "Step 6: Maintaining Hope," in *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1994), 124.
[4] Jim Alcock, Bill Carment, & Stan Sadava, *A Textbook of Social Psychology* 3rd ed. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1994) is an example of textbooks that describe how social behaviours are developed and change.

theories or personal explanations of how things work help us make sense of and interact with our environment. "Constructivism" is one theory that helps explain how we develop our initial theories or beliefs about events, active agents such as people and animals, and objects. It is an especially useful theory for my purposes because it is congruent with the feminist framework of how we gain knowledge, develop theories, and transform social systems and structures.[5] History indicates that activists and social reformers, including feminists, understood and used the processes we now call constructivism to negotiate reform long before the theory became public knowledge.[6]

Constructivism's main premise is that a person construct his or her own meaning or understanding about how things operate from personal observations. This theory by Carol Muritzen and Michael Jaeger "recognise[s] that [someone else's] perspective cannot be transmitted directly, but must be constructed by [each person] for themselves, through a process of building on what they already know and gradually elaborating the framework within which they know it."[7] This theory explains transformation in beliefs or knowledge as occurring through one of two processes. First, individuals form new beliefs and expand their understanding of their world by a process of building on previous knowledge. Second, individuals may be prompted to challenge a previous belief and substitute an alternate explanation if sufficient dissonance develops through interactions with their personal

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[5] Lorraine Code "How Do We Know? Questions of Method in Feminist Practice," in Sandra Burt & Lorraine Code, eds. *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995), 21; Colin Scott, "Science for the West, Myth for the Rest," in Laura Nader ed. *Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 73; and Karen M. Fox, "Leisure," in Karen J. Warren ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 164.

[6] Renate Duelli-Klein, "Hedwig Dohm: Passionate Theorist (1833-1919)" in Dale Spender, ed. *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key WomenThinkers* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 165-183, provides an example of one woman activist who used constructivist" principles of education and awareness before they were widely accepted.

[7] Carol Lauritzen & Michael Jaeger, "Constructivism: A Theory of Learning," in *Integrating Learning Through Story: The Narrative Curriculum* (Albany: Delmar Publishers, 1997), 58.

environment.[8] Feminist research takes advantage of both processes to effect social transformation. At times the feminist researcher creates new knowledge that adds to our existing knowledge. At other times the new knowledge challenges our previous beliefs creating dissonance that encourages us to change our previous interpretations of events.

Research from the margins is about social change. It is about creating knowledge with people from the margins in a manner that describes, explains, and helps them change the world in which they live.[9] Feminists have identified patriarchy, "the historic system of male dominance"[10] that oppresses some individuals and privileges others, as a major problem. Patriarchy has many facets or faces that maintain it, such as written history, mainstream research, and socialisation.[11] When individuals of different genders or cultural backgrounds are judged differently for similar behaviours, discrimination that originates with the prejudicial patriarchal values our culture embraces is likely involved. Feminists have developed methods to examine the problems oppression causes in people's lives and the influences that reinforce the dominant social values.[12] Their theories and methods can help beginning researchers, like me, develop a workable process to research a specific form of oppression.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explain the process and theories that I used in exploring my thesis topic, "Mothers who live apart from their children." First, I describe

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[8] Ibid., 47-77.

[9] Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, "Introduction," to *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1989), 17.

[10] Robyn Rowland & Renate Klein, "Radical Feminism: History, Politics, Action," in Dianne Bell & Renate Klein, eds. *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed* (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1996), 14.

[11] Dorothy E. Smith, "A Peculiar Eclipsing: Women's Exclusion from Man's Culture," in *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 19-34 discusses the problems women experience because they are excluded from creating knowledge (writing history or doing science).

[12] Ibid., 34- 36, See Dorothy E. Smith for an introduction to how as feminists we can begin to create social change.

some of the feminist theories and methods that contributed to my understanding of oppression and then I outline the methods I used during my research.

Feminist Theories

Feminist research is different from other research, not because of the methods used, but rather because of the researcher's goals and understanding of how and who creates knowledge. Feminist researchers believe that, in the past, most knowledge has been created from the standpoint of the oligarchy to maintain their sovereignty. Feminist researchers aim to unmask the tacit biases of this knowledge and attempt to correct the misconceptions produced by the so-called objective and neutral "scientific method" of determining universal truths typically used in research.[13] To achieve this goal, they have modified old, and developed new, research methods that promote the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of those individuals formerly excluded from knowledge creation.

Mothers who live apart from their children live at least this part of their lives at the margins of society. Their status as mothers frequently goes unacknowledged and their experiences are not included when public policy or societal beliefs are developed or formed. This invisibility is disempowering because it denies their experiences as individuals and members of society and prevents their participation in knowledge formation.[14] Consequently, their invisibility promotes the continuation of stereotypes, prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours that are not based on reality and which are likely to go unchallenged as long as their experiences are denied.[15]

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[13] Ibid., "Introduction," 1-6, for a discussion of the knowledge creation that is congruent with the ruling classes objectives.

[14] Ibid., "A Sociology of Women," 95.

[15] See Jim Alcock, Bill Carment, & Stan Sadava, "Prejudice, Discrimination and Sexism" Ibid., 220-261, for a discussion on the formation and maintenance of stereotypes.

How does my research on mothers who live apart from their children contribute to the goals of feminist research? What contribution might it make to increase women's agency? I sought the answers to these questions by examining the work of feminists who are recognised for their understanding of feminist research. Shulamit Reinharz writes that feminist research, "strives to represent human diversity, ...[is] guided by feminist theory, . . . frequently includes the researcher as a person, [and] . . . .aims to create social change."[16] Further, feminist research seeks to reveal and alter the systems and structures of subjugation and control through critical inquiry.[17]

Social transformation is one of the main goals of feminist research. Participatory research is one method researchers use to improve the lives of those being studied, transform fundamental social structures and patterns of relating, and develop critical consciousness. It does so through a three-step process of investigation, education, and action.[18] In my research, my understanding of feminist methods such as grounded theory, case studies, reflexive analysis, ethnography, and collective action guides my interpretation of these steps. Feminist Standpoint Theory, as developed by Dorothy Smith, contributes to my analysis of how our culture's structure contributes to the oppression of mothers who live apart from their children.

Participatory research is one type of qualitative research. Similar to other qualitative research it is concerned with the meanings both the researcher and the researched use to construct their understanding of reality. It is a systematic method of knowledge creation with the goal of personal and social metamorphosis. At its core is an understanding

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[16] Shulamit Reinharz, "Conclusions," *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 240.

[17] Patricia Maguire, "Different Lenses for Viewing Reality: Pardigms and Research," in *Doing Participatory Research: a feminist approach* (Amherst: Center for International Education, 1987), 15.

that there is more than one method of creating knowledge and more than one way of explaining beliefs, thoughts, actions, and material reality. Transformation is achieved by developing a critical consciousness in those individuals who participate in this form of research and in those with whom the research is shared.[19] Participatory researchers seek to understand how the fabric or paradigm that guides our understanding of reality is created and maintained by developing a critical mindset that is a combination of self-reflection and understanding. Part of this understanding is that our social system is unjust to some of its members and that what we accept as natural is not a result of unaltered nature but a construct of civilisation.[20] Participatory researchers are concerned with freeing individuals from oppressive systems and empowering them to begin creating a social order that is based on equality and respect for all inhabitants of our planet Earth.

A short detour is necessary before proceeding to describe Feminist Standpoint Theory and Grounded Theory. My literature review revealed that there are disagreements in academia about what these terms mean. Dorothy Smith, one of the main contributors to Feminist Standpoint Theory, appears to have a different interpretation of it than do Janice Ristock and Joan Pennel.[21] Likewise, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, the founders of Grounded Theory, have different perspectives about what constitutes Grounded Methodology.[22] A lengthy review of the academic debate about who is accurately representing or misrepresenting either their own or other scholars' contributions to the field

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[18] Ibid., "Adjusting the Lens: Participatory Research," 29.
[19] Ibid., "Introduction," 3, 5.
[20] Ibid., "Different Lenses for Viewing Reality: Paradigms and Research," 14.
[21] Dorothy Smith, Ibid., and Janice L. Ristock and Joan Pennell, "Empowerment as a Framework for Community Research," in *Community Research as Empowerment: Feminist Links, Postmodern Interruptions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.
[22] Anselm L. Strauss & Juliet Corbin, "Preface," to *Basic of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 8.

of feminist research is clearly outside the goals of my thesis and therefore I will not include one. However, recognising that there is confusion about the substance of the theories and methods I am using obligates me to reduce the likelihood of miscommunication by alerting my readers that that there are different interpretations and to clearly state the ones I am using.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist Standpoint Theory, as articulated by Dorothy Smith in The Everyday World as Problematic (1987), examines the world from the viewpoint of the absent or invisible woman. She advocates beginning one's research by creating a space to be filled during the research with the presence and experiences of real women talking about their own lives and exploring the connections between the subject of inquiry and their relationship with those in power.[23] Similar to grounded theory, she proposes that it is necessary to go beyond the descriptive and develop methods of thinking that preserves the subjects' presence while explicating or explaining their relations to their community.[24] Agreeing with Shulamit Reinharz, Dorothy Smith frequently advocates triangulation or investigating what one is researching from multiple points of view. This research method, studying something from different angles, is unlikely to encourage the reduction of knowledge to a single standpoint or view. Instead, it is likely to promote a more comprehensive view of what is being studied similar to what I was called to develop in biology and will explain shortly.

Feminist Standpoint Theory respects women's understanding of how their lives are lived within the confines of society's structure.[25] This theory includes the recognition that western society is more complex than Marxist theories of social relations presume. It also

[23] Dorothy Smith, "Introduction" Ibid., 5; *The Everyday World as Problematic* Ibid., 106.
[24] Ibid., 117.
[25] Dorothy Smith, "A Sociology for Women," Ibid., 84.

includes the understanding that the feminist researcher will participate in the research as a subject as well as the researcher. The latter is often facilitated with the researcher using logs and journals to document the research process and their thoughts and feelings during data collection and analysis.[26] In writing up research, the researcher includes her/himself as subject when (s)he makes her/his interaction with the other participants and data visible.

Feminist Standpoint Theory attempts to separate the social meaning we attach to something such as an event or object from it as a separate identity. Researchers using Feminist Standpoint Theory study the influences of human interpretation. Once we have separated some aspect of humanity into what is observed versus how the observation is interpreted, even if we do so imperfectly, we can begin to analyse both components separately. Studying how socialisation influences our relationships with each other helps us identify the filter or lens through which we view something and give meaning to it. Thus it helps us recognise that different understandings are possible. This empowers us to see new relationships and construct different realities than the interpretations that we normally take as givens that oppress some people and privilege others.[27]

Laurel Richardson proposes that crystallisation replace triangulation, because

> the central image for 'validity' . . . is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central image is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutation, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous.[28]

Her discussion about crystallisation is similar to my discussion, which follows, about the focal lengths used in biology. As she notes, how one sees something is influenced by one's

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[26] Dorothy Smith, "Ibid., 56; "The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Methodology," Ibid 115; Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, Ibid., 20-21.

[27] See Dorothy Smith, "Institutional Ethnography," 155-157 for a discussion of socialisation as part of actual experience.

own experiences and who one is as a person. She further expounds that "writing is a process of discovery. . . . The researcher's self-knowledge and knowledge of the topic develops through experimentation with point of view, tone texture, sequencing, metaphor, and so on."[29] My analysis in chapters 3 and 4 are examples of analysing the same data in two different manners. The way I position myself in each determines what type of analysis I did and how I interpreted the data.

My understanding of the feminist research process is strongly influenced by my undergraduate studies in Biology, Organic Chemistry and Social Psychology. None of these three areas of study, as taught by my instructors, incorporated the dominant discourse of positivism -- that there is only one truth.[30] Instead, my instructors freely acknowledged that there was more than one 'truth' and more than one method to study something. In retrospect, their pedagogy appeared to be informed by the alternate discourse on science as discussed by authors such as Donna Haraway, David Hess, Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Joni Seager, Lynda Birke and Ruth Hubbard. Similarily to my science teachers, these authors believe that understanding or knowledge can be gained through multiple observations and identifying the patterns that emerge.[31] My instructors acknowledged that the environment influenced how chemicals, organisms or people reacted.[32]

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[28] Laurel Richardson, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in Norman K Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Ibid., 522.

[29] Ibid., 523.

[30] Dorothy Smith, "A Peculiar Eclipsing," Ibid., 17 and Patricia Maquire, Ibid., 13, 14.

[31] Donna Haraway, Ibid., David Hess, *Science & Technology: In a Multicultural World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publications, 1993), Joni Seager, *Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Global Environmental Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and Lynda Birke & Ruth Hubbard, eds *Reinventing Biology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

32 For example, a high or low atmospheric pressure, as indicated by the barometer reading, may delay or prevent a chemical reaction from proceeding to completion or hasten the reaction and it may also influence people's well being and thus their reactions.

My first year biology instructor, for instance, began our first class by discussing that the view we have of an organism, or a community of organisms depends on the 'viewpoint' and tools we use to study it and that at times our prior knowledge of something can prevent us from seeing what is before us. Throughout that course and my other biology courses, the instructors frequently reminded us that the specimens we studied were part of a plant or animal and its community. We were asked to examine various aspects of a particular organism, recognise that each view contributed to a holistic understanding of the organism, and that each cell, organ, organ system, etc. contributed to the overall functioning of the organism. We learned that knowledge about all aspects of the organism was necessary -- from the interior of the nucleus to the interaction of the organism's immediate community with the cosmos -- if we were to understand the organism from a holistic level. We used prepared slides and videos extensively as lab specimens to reduce the number of organisms we killed. We also learned to recognise the artefacts or items that we or the individuals who prepared our lab specimens introduced into our research and not to mistake them as part of what we were studying. This approach to research prepared me to be open to a complex rather than a reductionist approach to research. Later I found that in feminist research, just as in biological research, it is important to acknowledge that 1) the perspective from which I look at something influences what I see, 2) it is necessary to know about all aspects of something to understand it, 3) it is important to acknowledge my conceptual baggage and what I am bringing into my research, 4) culture is subject to change and does not indicate destiny (or in biology the dye my slide is prepared with is not an organism's colour nor is the reaction of an organism to the fixative or dye part of the organism's normal reactions), and 5) subjects (organisms) are alive and feel pain – respect them!

Chemistry was another revelation for the instructor as well as for me. I had not realised I was slightly colour blind and that I was not seeing or labelling the colours the same way as did the other students. The instructor produced a chart so that the colour-blind students could compare their results to agreed upon standards and have someone else check the results for accuracy when necessary. Colour was not just a colour. It was constructed – an agreed upon category -- and did not necessarily conform to what I actually saw. This lesson was repeated to me in social psychology, but this time using language that is more congruent with that of feminist research.

In social psychology I learned that what we perceive to be real is a construct. This philosophy is shared by constructivism. Central to each of these respective areas of enquiry is the idea that perceptions are based on the sum of all we have observed, been taught, and experienced, and are subject to change. Social psychologists study how our perceptions are formed, how they control our actions, and how both our perceptions and actions can be changed.[33] One method of changing beliefs is to provide new information that challenges old beliefs while simultaneously educating the recipients that acting in congruence with the new information promotes the self-image they desire. An example of this is the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia's campaign against "Drinking and Driving." This campaign educated us about the dangers of drinking and driving and that responsible people who care about their fellow human beings drive only when sober. Statistical measurements indicate drinking and driving crashes decreased by approximately 50 percent by 1987 and a further 10 – 20 percent by 1995.[34] Unconscious or conscious

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[33] See Jim Alcock, Bill Carment, & Stan Sadava, Ibid., for a basic understanding of social psychology.
[34] ICBC, *Road Safety: Drinking Driving Counter Attack* (http://www.icbc.com/safety/attack.html), June 16, 1999.

recognition that beliefs and actions are changeable and need to be changed is the impetus that prompts activists, including feminist activists, to work toward transforming how our social system operates.[35]

Grounded Methodology

Grounded methodology or theory is a qualitative method of inquiry developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss.[36] Like other qualitative research, it emphasises that research is value-laden and "stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry." It is flexible and subject to adaptation and redesigning during the research process; collects data using field observation, interviews, and primary documents; and may use qualitative, quantitative or both types of data.[37] Grounded theory's methodology is committed to systematically gathering and analysing data. It is a general method of theory development and verification. Theory evolves during the research process "through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection. A central feature of this analytic approach is 'a general method of (constant) comparative analysis' . . ."[38] that develops theory that is 'conceptually' dense and contributes to the cumulative creation of knowledge.[39] It is an interpretative method of research that includes the views and voices of the people studied.

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[35] See Janice L. Ristock & Joan Pennell, "introduction," Ibid., ix, for an example of the assumption that social change is possible. Also see Schulamit Reinharz, "Feminist Action Research," Ibid., 175 for a discussion of the feminists research relationship to social change.

[36] Barney G. Glaser & Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1967).

[37] Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction," 2; Janice M. Morse, "Designing Funded Qualitative Research, 218; Anslem Strauss & Juliet Corbin, "Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview," 274; in Norman K Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Handbook of Qualitative Research (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994) 2, 218, 274.

[38] Ibid., 273 .

[39] Ibid., 274.

Researchers accept responsibility for their interpretations and the data they select to include in the finished product.[40]

Grounded feminist methodology does not presuppose research findings. It allows the subjects to speak from their own lived experience and systematically develops theories that might explain what is happening. The researchers attempt to suspend their personal hypotheses about the phenomenon. Theories are generated by interpreting the reality under investigation, and are subsequently tested provisionally in relation to it. Data analysis consists of the researcher(s) looking for the themes and theories that emerge while they work with the data. This is an inductive method of data analysis because it goes from the particular data under study to develop theory rather than going from the general theory and looking for instances to test it.[41]

Case studies either of a particular individual or group of individuals who have experienced similar events are one method the feminist researcher uses when conducting grounded research. This method can enable a researcher to document what is happening for a particular group of people by "explor[ing] uncharted issues"[42] and telling their stories.[43] The method can help a researcher "rectify research tainted by gynopia" or challenge the "perceiving [of] women in . . .distorted ways."[44] As Shulamit Reinharz points out:

> the case study is a tool of feminist research that is used to document history and generate theory. It defies the social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions, and completeness. . . . The power of the case study to convey vividly the

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[40] Ibid., 273, 218.
[41] David Dooley, "Theory: Tentative Explanations," *Social Research Methods*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995), 65.
[42] Shulamit Reinharz, "Feminist Case Studies," Ibid, 167.
[43] Ibid., 171.
[44] Ibid., 168.

> dimensions of a social phenomenon or individual life is power that feminist researchers want to utilize.[45]

I chose to use multiple case studies with interviews in my research to explore and document a previously uncharted area of enquiry -- the experiences of mothers who live apart from their children and their feelings about those experiences. In choosing this method I acknowledged that "historically, feminist researchers used interviews for social reform purposes" and that I would use the knowledge that previous researchers contributed to the field of social transformation to guide my research.[46] After examining the available options, I believed that gathering my data through interviews and developing multiple case studies using grounded methodology which I interpreted using feminist standpoint theory was the best method to meet my research objectives of telling these mothers' stories and facilitate a reduction in their oppression.

My Research Process

The first part of this chapter described the theories and methods I used in developing my research that provided the epistemological framework for my research. First, I outlined my perspective on how socialisation contributes to oppression and why social transformation is necessary. Second, I briefly reviewed the goals of feminist research and the specific methods and theories I chose to use such as participatory research, grounded methodology and feminist standpoint theory. I also included a review of how my education contributed to my understanding of multiple perspectives of the same event, object, or living organism and an example of how social transformation can be actively managed by providing new information. In this final section I turn my attention to describing the process

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[45] Ibid., 174,

[46] Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 53.

of how I developed my research topic, found participants, and collected and analysed my data. I present my method section or the process I used to conduct my research and prepare my thesis in the same order I carried it out. This was:

1. Ethical considerations – setting up a research method that respects the sensitive nature of my topic and the autonomy of my co-researchers.
2. Getting ready – developing my research topic, preparing my interview questions, and keeping track of the process.
3. Participant selection – finding willing participants who met my research criteria.
4. Data collection – scheduling and conducting the interviews.
5. Working with my data – initial data preparation and editing, theme coding and analysis.
6. Checking for validity – checking validity using comparative analysis.
7. Preparing the finished product.

Ethical considerations

In all research it is imperative to maintain the privacy and anonymity of one's participants. In my particular research, extra sensitivity was required because it appears that the majority of women who live apart from their children choose to keep their status as mothers private. They likely make this decision, as my preliminary literature research and experiences indicate, because in our culture they risk discrimination if their status is revealed.

In conducting my research, I had, as do all researchers, a responsibility to my participants and the public to gather my data and use it in an ethical manner. Additionally, as a student I needed to consider the ethical guidelines of my university. Subsequently, I took six steps to ensure that my research was ethical. First, I ensured that I had no professional contact in the past, and was unlikely to have any professional contact in the immediate

future, with any woman who participated in my research. Second, after I explained the study and the nature of their participation verbally and in writing to each participant, they signed an informed consent form (see appendix). This consent form included a statement to the effect that if a participant mentioned any incidents of child-abuse that I was legally obliged to report I would do so. It also mentioned that I would use pseudonyms to identify each participant and only use non-identifying information when writing my thesis. Third, I stored the tapes and transcripts of the interviews in locked containers in my home and kept a record to connect the consent form and the pseudonym in a separate locked location away from the interview data. Fourth, my participants and I either modified any data that was too revealing to make it generic or removed it from the data set so that I did not include it in my thesis. I used the copies of these modified transcripts to write my thesis only after the mothers approved them. Fifth, I will dispose of all audio-tapes and data except for the transcripts that my co-researchers approved. I will keep these transcripts in secure storage for a period of five years in accordance with the advice of my thesis committee.

Getting ready

As discussed previously in this chapter, research from the margins is about change and creating knowledge with people from the margins. A researcher's choice to use participatory research often originates in their desire to assist community members to negotiate changes in their environment. This was the reason I chose to use a modified form of participatory research. In developing my research topic, I took into consideration the stated desires for social reform of my participants, who were all mothers who lived apart from their children, from one of my previous unpublished research projects. In addition I accepted the assistance of two of my friends who live apart from their children. My friends

helped me develop a process that they would be comfortable using and interview questions that they felt would help me explore the lives of mothers who did not cohabit with their children. One of these friends became a participant in my research.

My friends spent a good deal of time discussing my previous research with me, what was important to them as mothers who lived apart from their children, and how or why I should ask various questions to find out about the experiences of mothers who lived apart from their children. We used an interactive process to develop the interview questions, or the words I would use to introduce the topics I wanted to find out about.[47] First, I included a demographic section to determine who my participants were and how they came to live apart from their children. Second, we developed some questions to identify at least partially the socialisation factors that were influencing how the women interpreted events in their lives. Finally we developed the remainder of the questions by looking at the data from my previous project and adding items that my friends felt were important for my co-researchers to include in their stories. After numerous cups of tea and visits, my two friends and I developed a set of interview questions that we agreed were appropriate. With some minor modifications and amendments my thesis committee approved the final format for inclusion in my thesis proposal (see appendix).

I took advantage of the time required to write my thesis proposal not only to study appropriate research methods and theories but also to develop a theoretical understanding and critical mind set about my area of research. During this time I used primary literature (newspaper articles) and secondary literature (books & journal articles) to develop a theoretical sensitivity about the issues that might be relevant to mothers who lived

[47] Jenifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 43.

apart from their children. I also had an opportunity to develop my awareness and empathy for women who live apart from their children through my part-time work in two women's shelters. The first, Advocacy for Women and Children, is a shelter for women who "have fallen through the cracks" and do not meet the criteria for other social services. The second, the Elizabeth Fry Society in Prince George, runs a transition house for women leaving abusive relationships.

Participant selection

I used three methods to contact potential co-researchers and accepted all women who agreed to participate and who fit my research criteria. First, I talked to my friends and colleagues and asked if they knew of anyone who would be willing to participate. Second, I contacted several organisations in Prince George who would likely be in contact with mothers who lived apart from their children and asked if I could post information sheets requesting that potential participants contact me. Finally, I discussed my research with new acquaintances when they asked me the inevitable get-to-know you question, 'what do you do?' Eleven women responded to my request for participants and six choose to become co-researchers and participate in my research.

My original research criteria specified that each of my co-researchers live in Prince George and was a mother of at least one child less than seventeen years of age of whom she did not have custody. Mothers who have joint custody of their children were defined as mothers having custody and not selected as participants. Mothers of children less than seventeen years of age were chosen because the interpretation of the following policy by Youth Works, a government agency that provides services for young adults, is that seventeen

is the earliest age in British Columbia that individuals are permitted to live independently. Here is an excerpt from the policy manual they used to make this decision:

> **Authority Matrix**
>
> - Approval for 17 and 18 year old if no protection concerns [DS].
>
> **Right to Apply**
>
> - Children under the age of 19 have the right to apply for assistance. Under the provisions of the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act, there can be no discrimination on the basis of age.
>
> **Referral to Social Worker**
>
> - An application is required prior to a referral to a social worker
> - A referral is made to a social worker when:* There are child protection concerns regarding an applicant for assistance who is under 19 years of age; or* The applicant for assistance is less than 17 years of age.[48]

I modified my original criteria slightly to include one mother whose child returned home after the interview was scheduled and before I conducted it. The day of the interview neither of us knew whether the child was or was not choosing to remain at home. Because I had trouble successfully contacting more than five participants who lived in Prince George, I included two mothers who lived in a nearby community.

In attempting to contact mothers in Prince George who met my research criteria and who were willing and able to participate, I had completed or made arrangements for only five interviewees. Consequently, with my thesis supervisor's permission, I accepted a friend's offer to help me find participants in another community about two hours from Prince George. She located three women who fit the criteria. Two agreed to participate and one was available on the day I had transportation arranged. I made a second contact in this community through a mutual acquaintance in Prince George. As a result, two of my interviews were conducted in that rural community rather than in Prince George.

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[48] British Columbia, Ministry of Human Resources, 1998, BC Benefits Manual, April, 1998, 7.10.1.

Throughout the remainder of my thesis I use the term "co-researcher" to refer to my participants. This acknowledges that the six women who participated in my research were not passive subjects but were actively engaged in what data they chose to provide and in my analysis. As Patricia Maquire states, "Participatory research is structured to shift the power control of decision making and decision taking increasingly into the hands of the participants."[49] Enabling my participants to act as co-researchers was, as I discuss further in Chapter 3, an appropriate method for this particular research topic. Using this method allowed me to take full advantage of their expertise, alleviated their anxiety that I would use data they later decided they did not wish to share, and ensured that their voices were audible in the finished product.

Data Collection

My interview process used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. As Shulamit Reinharz states, "semistructured refers to a research approach whereby the researcher plans to ask questions about a given topic but allows the data-gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained."[50] I chose this method of research because it enabled my co-researchers to remain in charge of their interview, determine what information they shared, and promoted a mutual exchange of information.[51] This interview process strives for intimacy and may include self-disclosure from the researcher if appropriate. The actual format of the interviews followed a process similar to that of other grounded feminist researchers. I pre-identified my areas of interest and listened as my co-researchers responded in the order they chose and introduced other topics as they

[49] Patricia Maguire, "Adjusting the Lens: Participatory Research," Ibid., 39.
[50] Shulamit Reinharz, "Conclusions," Ibid., 281.
[51] Ibid.

saw fit. Using this process required that mutual trust existed between my co-researcher and myself.[52]

I conducted interviews with three participants during the early fall of 1998 and the final three in January of 1999. Each primary data collection interview was audio-taped and transcribed later. These interviews took place in a number of different locations and varied according to length. Four of these six data collection interviews were held in the afternoon. The other two were held in the evening and morning respectively. Each of the mothers who agreed to participate in my research chose a location and time with which she was comfortable for the audio-taped interviews. Other interviews took place face-to-face or over the phone that were not audio-taped. Brief field notes were taken during or after each interview to record context and participant's emotional state, and placed in my research log or included in the women's transcripts.

My data collection process was planned to include an informal, audio-taped, face-to-face first interview to develop rapport and trust, and initiate data collection. This was followed by subsequent multiple audio-taped interviews. My initial contact with my co-researchers, however, did not support using this approach. Because remaining flexible and allowing one's participants to control the research process is part of grounded theory, I was willing to change my plans. It became apparent that due to the nature of my research, my co-researchers desired to build rapport and trust with me before agreeing to participate in my research. They did this over the phone or in public places. Audio-taping any of these initial contacts was inappropriate because no consent forms had been signed. Permitting my first three co-researchers to modify my research methods resulted in a new process that seemed to

[52] See Shulamit Reinharz, "Feminist Interview Research," Ibid., 24, for a discussion of interviewee guided research.

fit both their needs and those of my other participants needs better. During my initial contact with them, my first two participants asked me questions about who I was, what I was doing, and why I was doing it, and then arranged for me to give them 'a set of research papers.' These papers are included in my appendix and consist of an information sheet, a list of care providers in case my co-researchers had problems after an interview, a consent form, and the interview questions (Appendices A-D). My potential interviewees then agreed that either they would contact me or I would contact them in a week to determine if they had decided to participate and set a time for the interview.

My first few participants' modifications to my original research plans set the tone for my later contacts. It was obvious from their questions that I was being checked out. They were most anxious to see the interview questions and know how I felt about mothers who lived apart from their children before agreeing to participate. My response fit with my beliefs and seemed to satisfy them – that there are many reasons that a mother lives apart from her children, most of which are influenced by our social system rather than a particular mother's behaviour. After allowing a week or so to elapse, I contacted my potential participants by phone if they had not contacted me. I answered any further questions and asked if they were choosing to participate. Ten said they would participate and we agreed to a time and place for their interview. Three of the ten women chose to withdraw before their face-to-face interview and one asked me to remove her data during my analysis phase for personal reasons.

This modification to the rapport-building process resulted in further modification to the interview process. Since most of the mothers said they were very busy, in most cases I conducted only one audio-taped face-to face interview with each co-researcher at which I

collected most of my primary data. One mother participated in an additional audio-taped interview to re-do the part of her interview I accidentally lost by over-taping.

At the primary data-collection interview we went over the information sheet, the informed consent form, and care provider information sheet together. My procedure of providing each mother with a copy of my interview questions, in advance, allowed my co-researchers greater flexibility in determining the order in which they answered my questions. After the consent form was signed, I asked each co-researcher if she was ready to proceed with the interview and when she agreed, I turned on my audio-tape recorder. With most of my co-researchers, I read the interview questions related to the demographic data and collected it first. Next I usually read the first open-ended interview questions to my interviewee at which point she usually decided to follow her own method of proceeding from one interview question to the next while I listened and gave her an opportunity to make uninterrupted comments. I asked for further clarification when necessary and assisted each co-researcher in summarising the information she gave me. The transcripts of the data indicate that my co-researchers went back and forth between topics. At times we turned off the audio tape recorder and had a private conversation. At other times during the interviews I responded to requests for information from my literature review or about my own life. I gained more confidence and skill and became more comfortable with the latter requests as I gained experience. In particular cases my co-researchers also wanted affirmation for their parenting choices. I felt uncomfortable with these requests and never developed a response with which I was completely satisfied.

Each co-researcher participated in at least two more follow-up interviews. One was to discuss and approve the final copy of her transcript, and another was to discuss my

analysis of her data. Two women have remained in contact with me, providing feedback about my analysis and how they want the knowledge we produced disseminated. Follow-up interviews, whether done over the phone or in-person were not audio-taped because that was my co-researchers' preference. However, I kept notes of those meetings, and at times my co-researchers gave me written comments to include as part of my data.

To keep track of my research process, as well as my own reactions to the process, I recorded notes in the margins of the transcripts and kept a research journal and log. Grounded theorists as discussed earlier in this chapter, recognise that research is value-laden and that the process is influenced by the interaction of the researcher with the data. Like participatory research, it requires the researcher to keep records of the research process, which then becomes part of the data. In my research log, I kept field notes on each interview to "jog my memory" about some of the salient features of the interview, non-verbal data, and any questions that I needed to gather information about during my next contact.[53] I also recorded notes that included relationships to new interpretations, leads, and connections between data. I used these notes to determine what data I should collect during later interviews and in my analysis. This process is often called memoing, diagramming, or marginal remarks.[54] To keep track of what was happening for me during my research, I kept a journal. In my journal, I recorded items that affected the research process such as my preconceptions and ongoing relationship with the data. Keeping these records helped me remember that no data collection and analysis is truly objective but is affected by the researchers who design and conduct it. Recording this information also helped me recognise

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[53] Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, "Early Steps in Analysis," *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 51-54

[54] See Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, Ibid., 'marginal remarks,' 66-68, and Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, "Adjunctive Procedures," Ibid., 'memoing and diagramming,' 197-223.

where I needed a greater understanding of the data. This prompted me to action and, at times, alerted me that I needed to improve my interviewing skills. Even though I usually do not mention it in my analysis and discussion, interacting with my data and the research process through my logs and journals helped keep me aware of my conceptual baggage and challenge myself about them during my research.[55]

Working with my data

My process of data analysis can be broken down under four major headings: 1) transcribing, editing, and pre-analysing, 2) data preparation and preliminary analysis, 3) coding, and 4) checking for validity. As in most qualitative research, these were not discrete, sequential processes. Rather, I proceeded from one step to the next, backtracking when necessary, and proceeding in the general direction of producing a completed written thesis. First, I transcribed the interview. Next, I synthesised and analysed the data my co-researchers contributed in view of the information I had learned about qualitative research and the other data that I gathered.

Transcribing, editing and pre-analysing

As I proceeded into my data collection, I began to search out additional literature to clarify what my participants told me. At times they volunteered books they found helpful. During this intermediate phase of my research I went back and forth between the literature, my data and my participants to determine if my ongoing interpretation was accurate.

[55]Some feminist researchers define the biases of the researchers as conceptual baggage others prefer to just call them biases. Regardless of what they chose to call them most feminist and qualitative researchers recognise the importance of acknowledging both the process of the research and the feelings of the researcher as they participated in the process. Logs and journals are frequently used to facilitate this process. See Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, "Introduction," Ibid., 'conceptual baggage' and Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, "Introduction," Ibid., 6 'Reflective Remarks.'

After each interview, I transcribed the audio-tape. Before giving back the transcripts to my co-researchers so that they could verify the material, I assured each woman that she could correct the data or withdraw permission to use her data at any time. I returned the first three transcribed interviews to my co-researchers in person and we made the changes together. At this time I asked some questions to clarify the data and gave my co-researchers an opportunity to make corrections and elaborate on any area they wished. Several took the opportunity to do so. This process is consistent with grounded theory because it gives participants an opportunity to control the data used. It also increased their comfort level with the research process. When I had completed the changes in the first three interviews, I returned the transcripts to my participants for their approval. At this time, I again clarified any data I was uncertain about.

Owing to my observations in these initial interviews about what data my co-researchers and I removed as identifying, I took the liberty of modifying the transcripts of the other four mothers' interviews to this extent before returning them for editing and approval. This reduced the number of changes and simplified the verification process. The women's responses to my making anticipated changes before returning the transcripts indicated their approval of this process. Several mentioned where I had missed removing identifying information. With the XXX's visible where identifying information was deleted, they also exercised agency and substituted such words as 'son, daughter, or husband' to keep the interviews personal but non-revealing. Reducing the number of changes necessary also made it easier for the mothers who were very busy or lived outside the community to make transcript corrections and participate in further discussion over the telephone rather than in

person. This system made the out-of-town interviews work more efficiently and provided the flexibility some of the busy in-town mothers appreciated.

With experience, I became braver and returned the fifth transcript for editing broken into bibbits[56] ready for analysis rather than in the usual conversation format. Returning her transcript broken into units, each of which contained one complete thought ready for analysis, was accepted by this co-researcher and proved to be a positive modification from the usually procedure for two reasons. First, it saved my time. Instead of breaking the interview into the normal conversational pattern, I could break the transcript into blocks that included my co-researcher's and my own comments about a particular subject and be ready for further analysis. Second, it gave my co-researcher an opportunity to see what I was putting together as part of the same thought pattern. Making my pre-analysis visible in this manner enabled her to see clearly if I had misunderstood her during the interview and correct my misconceptions. Consequently, I used this procedure for my last two interview transcripts as well and was met with equal acceptance and success.

Data Preparation and Preliminary Analysis

Seven approved transcripts sat in front of me in hard copy and seven transcripts were broken into bibbits ready for analysis. I later removed on of these transcripts from my data set. It had taken six months from receiving my ethics approval to reach this point. Ten hours of audio-taped interviews or 74 pages of transcribed interviews were broken down into 761 bibbits or thought units ready for analysis; this was the data I would analyse and write my thesis on. I moved my data from the word processing program I had prepared the

[56] Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna, "Preparing for Analysis and Analysis Introduction," Ibid., 135, define a bibbit as "a passage from a transcript, a piece of information from field notes, a section of a document or snippet of conversation recorded on a scrap of paper that can stand on its own but, when necessary can be relocated in its original context."

transcripts in to Access, a versatile program that includes spreadsheets. This process took about one hour for twenty prepared pages. At this point, I also added my field notes and journal entries to the bottom of the transcripts so that I could include them in my analysis. Once this step was completed I proceeded with my preliminary analysis.

Coding

My preliminary data coding included developing general and finer categories. Because I only had six co-researchers, I coded all demographic data simply as demographic and did not break it down further. I initially coded two of the longer and one of the shorter interviews – choosing those co-researchers whose reasons for living separate from their children were most dissimilar. This helped me develop a feel for what categories would likely be appropriate. I then compared these initial analyses for related themes.

To code my data I used the open-coding system of data analysis. This is compatible with grounded theory and feminist standpoint theory because it does not develop codes or labels for the data in advance. Instead, the researcher develops the labels to fit the data collected by reflecting on possible categories and relationships between categories.[57] Developing themes was difficult. I labelled each discrete unit of information. I tried to generate categories for the labels. Themes developed, but not in the manner I anticipated from the descriptions of coding I remembered. Going back to my resource books, I found Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's description of "loosely interwoven concepts" that seemed to fit the data I collected.[58] Using their system of analysis of open coding, axial coding and selective coding I was able to begin making sense of my data. Initially I had open coded or labelled all bibbits for a number of categories (the actor, the responder, event, relative time of

[57] Ibid., p.57-68, and Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, "Coding Procedures," Ibid., 62-73.
[58] Ibid., 57.

the event, and degree of agency for the speaker). Proceeding to the next analysis step, axial coding, I attempted to make connections that highlighted the relationships between the actors, context, circumstances, actions, and responses.[59] However, I had a problem when I attempted to take this step. Whether a category was supraordinate or subordinate depended not on the data, but how I looked at the data. Fortunately, Access is a flexible program that permits sorting and resorting within categories and among categories rather than being fixed once the initial sort is made. Eventually I developed a systematic approach to data analysis by considering the characteristics of the data I collected and how they might be combined to form categories, and where each bibbit was located on the continuum within the potential categories.

The method of axial coding that best suited my data was to separate it into the activities or events that my co-researchers had during their interviews. This provided themes such as the women's 1) separation from their children and feelings about the separation, 2) social interactions and how they felt about them, and 3) agency in all of the events or interactions that they described. It was not too precise and it took a lot of reflection on my part. Each event usually had a precondition or context that initiated it and each event was usually followed by my co-researcher making a personal analysis of it to explain it to herself. Common themes emerged from similar activities or events. For example, many of the mothers' affective and cognitive responses to the separation from their children were similar. Most of my data reached the saturation point, the point at which no new information was being contributed, before I interviewed my sixth co-researcher.

[59] Ibid, 96-115.

Preparing to complete the third step, selective coding, I examined the data between themes and attempted to relate it to the other themes. One overriding theme emerged, that of agency. Looking at my co-researchers' lives from this perspective helped me develop a better understanding of how much actual control they had in a given situation. This did not, however, provide one answer about the amount of agency a woman might have in a particular situation because the amount of agency I perceived her to have depended on the focal length I used to examine her available options. Rather, each discrete event had many permutations of how I could examine it – and what I saw depended on which permutation I was currently using. Eventually I chose to re-analyse my data to determine why my participants chose to participate in my research. This provided a focus and helped me identify and include in my analysis the areas my co-researchers considered most important.

Having made the decision to focus my analysis on discrimination and the effects of marginalisation, the areas my co-researchers felt created the most problems for them, I proceeded to the final steps in my analysis. In almost all instances I was able to identify chains of events. During this segment of my analysis I used rough parallel diagrams with the links sketched in between them to integrate the emerging themes, check my data for validity, and examine and integrate the emerging themes. Their function was similar to that of matrices.[60] First, I systematically organised the preconditions into abstract categories. Next, I ordered these categories according to my co-researchers' attributions from least effect on the phenomena to greatest effect on either determining their available options or feelings. Finally, I evaluated the conditional diagram to see if it worked. To do so I checked the fit of

[60] Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, "Within-Case Displays: Exploring and Describing," Ibid., 90-142; Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, Ibid., 158-175.

each participant's data to it. I also checked back with my co-researchers to determine if the emerging theories sounded plausible to them. As a secondary validity check I referred back to feminist literature about similar research to determine if my findings suggested the same or different interpretations as other research findings.

Checking for Validity

Validity, as Samuel Messick, a psychologist, states is "an integrated evaluative judgement of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations and actions."[61] In addition, feminist researchers understand validity to include "the integrity and value of research." This is "achieved through accountability both to the participants and to those who will be affected by the outcome."[62] Analysing my data and checking for validity to determine whether my findings 'rang true' were not discrete processes. I used comparative analysis throughout this process, going back and forth between the data, discussions with a few of my co-researchers, and the body of literature I was using. When I gave each of my co-researchers an opportunity to look at my final analysis they were generally pleased with the results. The categories I chose to examine appeared to fit with their understanding of the event and conform to the goals they wanted my research to meet. My co-researchers' approval when I returned my analysis for their comments and when I contacted them to discuss my findings (recorded in my journal entries) confirms that I was allowing the data and participants to speak for themselves and thus conforming to Feminist Standpoint Theory.

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[61] Samuel Messick, "Validity of Test Interpretations and Use," Research Report 90-11 (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1990), 1.
[62] Janice L. Ristock and Joan Pennell, "Multiple Methods for Validity," Ibid., 50-51.

Making the decision to focus my descriptions on the areas that most of my co-researchers wanted put before the public created a problem. One co-researcher did not share my other co-researchers' opinions, felt that the focus of my analysis did not fit her situation, and chose to withdraw from my study. She had some valid comments. I appreciated her honesty in presenting them to me. I attempted to address her concerns, however, I was unable to do so adequately with the data I had and she chose to withdraw from my research. This left me with a total of six co-researchers.

Chapters 3 and 4 present my analysis and chapter 5 completes my thesis with a discussion of my findings. These three chapters are strongly influenced by my voice and provide insights into the experiences of mothers who live apart from their children from my perspective. This perspective is informed, as mentioned previously, by my own experiences and does not exclusively consist of the voices of my co-researchers. While I have checked back with my co-researchers for validity, they did not have access to their fellow co-researcher's transcripts, and thus could not make decisions as to whether I had presented all the data fairly. After my final analysis and before writing chapter 5, I checked to see if I had remained faithful to grounded feminist and standpoint theories. I also used applicable literature in related areas as a supplementary validity check for my research findings.

Chapter 3 introduces my co-researchers and presents their stories. In presenting their stories I have included some information about my research process, the mothers' stories about how they came to live apart from their children, and their feelings about this event.

CHAPTER THREE.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> Bernice angrily responded, "Well it better be at some point!" when I stated helplessly that there was not much information around about mothers who live apart from their children. I felt helpless. My co-researcher is in so much pain – ostracised and stigmatised – no one seems to have given her any acceptance. Will my research be able to help? Or will it be buried in the university library with all the other theses?
>
> Based on Journal Entry made during analysis
> February 12, 1999.

In this chapter, I introduce the six mothers I interviewed and provide some of the social context in which they live. I also describe why my co-researchers chose to participate in my research and some of their experiences of living apart from their children. Because I conducted feminist research, I aimed to reduce the distance between my co-researchers and myself and treat them as equals who were contributing valuable knowledge. This approach ensured their co-operation and helped me collect data rich in the details of their lives.

During the interviews, I listened to stories of marital rape and intimate family interactions. My co-researchers' stories granted me glimpses of their private lives and environments as mothers living apart from their children. At times, I received completely unexpected data such as one mother's in-depth account of separation and reunification with her children. Her unanticipated sharing of this information demonstrated to me an advantage of collaborating with one's co-researcher. Listening also taught me that my co-researchers might be benefiting from the interviews. When I asked Zaza about community support she responded, "I get support. People like you, being able to just [talk] about it here." 'Just talking' can be valuable for the participants and draws atten-tion to one of the basic tenets of feminism, the belief that the personal is political.

The information my co-researchers required before agreeing to participate in my research identifies a need for trust when conducting research about sensitive topics. My participants' caution is best illustrated by the comments of an acquaintance whom I asked to participate. She said, "No, it is too sensitive. Someone might identify me." Before agreeing to participate in my research, my co-researchers wanted to know that I was an accepting and non-judgemental person and would use the data in a manner to benefit rather than harm them. To develop trust, I usually self-disclosed that my two children had Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)[1] and that I had a lot of problems with being judged a bad parent because of their behaviour rather than because of my own parenting skills. This disclosure seemed to allay their fears and a conversation about negative, in our opinion, social interactions usually followed. Identifying myself as a peer and, implicitly, as another mother who was judged as "bad," developed a rapport between my co-researcher and myself and introduced our common goal – the need to reduce the negative judgements some mothers receive.

Before moving on to my analysis I would like to provide a brief profile of each of the women who participated in my research. Because it is important to maintain the anonymity of my co-researchers and North Central British Columbia is an area where many people know each other I have used pseudonyms, modified minor demographic details, and excluded information that could lead to my co-researchers' identification. In the cases where it was necessary in telling a woman's story to include information that might be

[1] The essential feature of ADHD is that the individual displays a 'persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity' including impulsivity across time and social situation to a greater degree than their cohorts. This disorder compromises an individual's ability to function in an age-appropriate manner in social, academic, and occupational environments. American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 78-94.

harmful her, I have not associated the information with a particular woman. Additionally the women who contributed these potentially sensitive anecdotes have viewed them in a draft version of my thesis and agreed with their inclusion. These modifications should not affect anyone's understanding of my co-researchers' experiences.

My Co-researchers' Profiles

Bernice

Bernice grew up in the lower mainland and had a "mostly good" childhood. She spent idyllic summers at their family's cottage and enjoyed being close to her family and going on family outings. Although she describes herself as not close to her mother, she said she recognised that they had similar abilities and that she respected her mother. She earned a BA in a discipline related to child management before marrying her husband over two decades ago. Bernice and her spouse are middle (professional) class and have three children that they adopted at birth. She describes herself as an active volunteer, a dedicated wife, and a full-time mother for the younger children who live at home. She strives to maintain a positive relationship with these children and, in her words, recognises that, "in order to have a closeness you have to do things with people."

Bernice's older child's birth mother used street drugs and the child suffered the effects of this pre-natal environment. Bernice says this child was:

> next to impossible to parent! . . . We took [the child] down to hospital after hospital. Children's [BC's Children's hospital], went to Sunnyhill. We were told we'd better bone up your marriage you know. Oh dear! And I think maybe you should stop arguing. When meanwhile this child is having a heyday. Just so much fun. . . . When people don't believe what you say, you know, it's total confusion inside you. And you feel like you are being massacred. I don't know.

Eventually Bernice's child was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and several other mental health disorders. Bernice identified a treatment centre that might have benefited her child but was denied access both directly and indirectly to the funds she required to obtain treatment. The child became involved with street drugs and associated crimes in late elementary school.

Bernice said that at this point she asked and hoped for respite care so she could continue to parent her child and that Ministry of Children and Families offered her two different choices: either one-hour per week's respite care or shared access. Since one hour a week was inadequate, she voluntarily accepted the shared access. Shared access meant placing her child in either a group or a foster home with Ministry of Children and Families. She said that it was "shared because you can phone them and they phone you and you discuss the problems and everything." 'Voluntarily' as Bernice explained the incident to me refers to the timing rather than the actually event. Elaborating further she said that, "the one social worker told me if I hadn't [given my older child] up they would have taken [all my] children." Bernice said that later the Ministry of Children and Families changed this arrangement and became the child's primary guardian. This child has been in and out of youth detention centres and MC&F group homes for the past several years and currently is serving a time at a juvenile correction centre for robbery with a weapon. Before Bernice's oldest child left home, she said that she spent a good deal of time maintaining their relationship.

Joan

Joan describes her early childhood as less than ideal. She lived with her grandmother and aunt while her mother worked in another community to support herself.

Her mother died after a lengthy illness when Joan was in her late teens. When I asked her about her family she said, " I was always seen as an outsider because I was born out of wedlock (Deep breathe to gain control.) Family to me means abuse, pain, loneliness . . . . And family to me spells like a trap as well." Joan perceived that her grandmother resented her presence; she also said that her aunt dominated her and abused her emotionally, physically, and sexually. When I asked her if she was willing to have me include something about her abuse, she stated:

> Regarding my abuse, my memories would point out that my mother's sister also sexually abused me. But, I believe that because a lot of the pain associated with [my] memories is still repressed, I will elaborate more on the emotional and mental abuse. . . . Some of the other ways my aunt abused me was hitting me with whatever was around: her hands, logs, pricking me with needles when she was sewing . . . I remember after she had just hit me, she would expect me to go and kiss her and then she would brag that, 'you could do anything to [Joan], she always forgives.'. . . . . I remember fragments like my uncle's fist close to my face. That uncle when I was 13 he tried to kiss me and trying to escape I tore my dress. . . . [My cousin who is four years older than me] I recall he had that kind of power over me, I felt I couldn't say no, since I was five. Sometime he would ignore me, and sometimes he would sexual interfere with me. . . . [It] carried on until after my mother died. He asked to have sex with me.

I am respecting Joan's request not to expand further on her childhood abuse issues.

Joan has some nursing training and university level courses. When she agreed to participate in my research, she had just gained her first well-paying job in many years as a direct care worker. When I asked her about her social class background she stated, "I am middle class. I earn above the poverty line."

Joan's marriage lasted over a decade before ending in divorce. About the separation and divorce she said:

> All that happened after my [last child] was born. I was very depressed. And I felt that my past was starting to bother me [and] it needed attention. It was like a turning point. I went into a very deep depression for quite awhile and I was in therapy at that time. And I think when I came out of that, I felt very

> angry at my husband. We left [the community] and my plans had been to go to the Sexual Assault Centre and start looking at my past. But then moving to [another community] I found that maybe the opportunity had escaped so I wanted to go back to [the first community] to retrace the steps to be able to go back and look for help.
>
> Something was not right within my marriage. But my husband believed everything was fine. And so I believed that I could only fix myself, I just could not fix him.

When she left, her spouse kept their children with him. Today, Joan's youngest children continue to live with her ex-spouse in another community. Her oldest child recently turned nineteen and lives independently in the same community as the father.

Anne

Anne was born in the lower mainland and adopted at birth. She grew up on a farm with her siblings and parents. She said her father and his father and some of his brothers sexually abused her and her response was to "act out." Anne said that her behaviour negatively affected her relationship with her mother and she left home at sixteen with a grade nine education. She completed grade twelve as a young adult after the birth of her two oldest children. She has four children, each from a different father, and has recently remarried. Anne has most frequently parented her children alone while living on social assistance. Her youngest children have always lived with her at home and both of the older two chose to leave home as teenagers.

In describing the incident immediately prior to her second oldest child leaving home Anne said:

> [my child] pulled a bonehead thing, [the child] stole my husband's thing. Of which my husband turned around; and got mad. When he gets mad at someone he stays mad. . . . He got so mad at my [child], and he wouldn't talk to him. . . . We had the counsellor here . . . and we were sitting here and discussing things, ... draft[ing] up a contract of expectations. . . . . [My child] ended up not going with that. [My child] came in late one night. And I

> said to [my child], 'you think this is a bloody game don't you?' [My child] goes, 'It's a game, you thinks this is a game! I'll show you a game.' And [my child] stormed off. And [my child] hasn't been home since.

After living with friends for awhile the child stayed with an adult mentor for about four months. Mother, child and husband went for counselling towards the end of this period. The child returned home the night before our audio-taped interview.

Zaza

Zaza said that she grew up on the British Columbia's lower mainland. About her family of origin she said:

> well I would have to say to people that it started when I was born because my mom had me . . . weeks early. And when she had me, she left me in the little hospital in [my home town]. which was a block from our house, and didn't go and see me. . . . Because of the circumstances of my birth, I don't think my mom and I ever bonded at all . . . . My family was difficult. . . . . If you didn't do what you were told or what they want you to do, or live your life like they would like you to, you didn't count. You didn't get that approval . . . my mom's love was conditional, it hinged on me doing as she wanted me to do.

Zaza also mentioned that the family joke implies that she was the cuckoo's egg that was left in the wrong nest and that she never really felt that she was part of her family.

Zaza currently is working on her Bachelor's degree. She had one child from a previous relationship before she met and married her husband. They have been married for about a decade and have two more children who live with them. Zaza's husband works as a professional in Central British Columbia. Her oldest child, as she says:

> was always difficult . . . But I knew that there was something not right. And I would take [my child] to my doctor and to the paediatrician. And they would say oh its just jitters, or you're new and you don't know anything. And they would sort of blow me off. But [my child] has what psychiatrists would call a very flat affect. [My child's] eyes are flat. It's hard to explain that, you don't, you don't see a lot of emotion or feeling in [my child's] eyes . . . . It's like for [my child's] whole life [my child] does not care about other people. It is very hard to explain. [My child] is very self-centred. What [my child] wants, [my child] will get regardless of the expense to other people.

Zaza could not find resources to help her care for her oldest child. She said that before her child went into Ministry of Children and Family's care:

> (s)he'd steal money . . . . (S)he ran away. . . . And the swearing. Holy cow! I swear when I get mad, but I don't swear at people. I'd ask [my child] to watch [the two younger children] in the living room so I could make dinner. . . . [and (s)he'd say] 'I'm not the one who can't keep my fucking legs closed. They're not my fucking kids, why the fuck should I watch them? . . . . Fuck you. Nobody can tell me what to do. You know, I'm my own fucking person. I don't have to fucking listen.' . . . . And [if] I would leave [this child] in the room with the [other children] and someone would get hurt. And one of [my younger children] would have [his/her] face on the rug with a cut lip.

Zaza's child currently lives separately from her and Zaza continues to parent the other two children with her spouse.

Laura

Laura was born and raised in a small community in North Central British Columbia. When I asked her about her relationship with her mother and about her childhood she stated:

> I never even had one [relationship with my mother]. . . . Before I was 10 I don't remember much. . . . I became 10 and I was independent, mouthy. I guess being the oldest I was always baby-sitting my [younger siblings]. I was the boss I guess; they had to do what I said. And mom went back to work, and that was it, we had no relationship. . . . I wouldn't consider what we had a family. At best a very dysfunctional one. My parents were on again off again . . . like sometimes they were together and sometimes they weren't. . . . . my dad walked out of the house on my brother's tenth birthday and I remember that very vividly.

Off tape, Laura volunteered that her dad did not really come back much after that point. She left school without graduating but returned and completed grade twelve. She works as a health care provider and earns less than the average wage of workers in her community.

Laura was a single parent before marrying the father of her other children. She separated from her spouse after being married just under a decade and initially took the children with her. About her relationship with her ex-spouse she said:

> but when I got with him within one year I was a meek shy quiet person that would sit in the corner and have not friends. And that wasn't me. My personality is very dominating, very loud. I'm a very loud person. But he was, he browbeat me. And he is good at it. . . . He [still browbeats me.] I just now hang up the phone. . . . . he usually gets me; he usually gets what he wants. He usually gets me crying by the time the conversation is over. . . . It's control. It's total and complete control. That is why he has the kids. He doesn't have the kids because he wants them there. They're a hindrance to him. He can't go out and drink every Friday night.

The children lived with Laura after she separated from her spouse. She said she had difficulty supporting herself and her children on child support, a part-time job, and social assistance. About this segment of her life she stated:

> We had just separated, and just gone through the court thing, and I got full custody of the kids. And he was paying $550 a month child support. And it didn't pay my rent. And I was just trying to get into school and finish my schooling and upgrading and stuff. . . . . He makes [in the top 10 percentile] a year. . . . I'm making borderline poverty money and he is making really good money. . . . In support of it too then with the kids staying with him is the gender difference between the paycheque. . . . . I was considered a welfare bum, because I wanted to take care of my children. That's the main reason I had to get off welfare. I could not stand and handle the looks and the accusations. And in retrospect they weren't as bad as what happened as when I gave the kids to their dad. You know, so it's you're damned if you do, and damned if your don't. And you try and make a better life for the kids, you try and get off welfare and, you can't get it. It was not worth my while, and still is not to go to work when I have those kids. Cause what I put out in baby-sitting. . . . . I can't afford it.

Laura's reference to 'giving' her children to her spouse was constrained, as I will show later, by what appears to be ongoing abuse by her ex-spouse. Today the children live with her ex-spouse, the father of the younger children, in another community about a day's drive from Laura.

Sandra

Sandra was born and raised in the lower mainland. About her childhood she said. "I come from an alcoholic background so it's basically as much as a mom is around

when the father is an alcoholic. So she did the best she could under the [circumstances]." Sandra graduated from grade twelve and has some post-secondary education. She was married for about a decade and a half and has five children, the youngest child is still less than seventeen years of age. She separated from her children's father approximately ten years ago and had custody of the children for about a year before they went to live with their father. About that year she said:

> So I have the kids in custody and whatever. And in that time I worked part-time at [a department store]. And then I got a job [in industry] full-time and so along with that came shift work. So I had to hire somebody to stay at my house and look after the kids. So any money I was getting from my ex-husband went directly to this girl, who wasn't probably the best, but it was all I could afford. She was quite young and she was nice and everything, but I ended up with another kid. [Laughter], a daughter.
>
> . . . it was just pretty overwhelming having the [children] like living, and I was just falling apart. And I only saw them half the time anyhow because I was night shift and day shift. And he was straight day shift. . . . and he had more money. . . . And then we went to a family court counsellor. And the court counsellor said you know [Sandra], for you to get the children to do anything it takes this much effort and for [your ex-spouse] it takes that much effort. So much more for the mom to get the [children] to do what you want them to do.
>
> And I was way too empathetic and didn't come from a stable family. . . . I was the boss in my family, basically . . . . [My mom] didn't really take on the role of caring for her children. While she looked after us, but she wasn't a very strong woman. I was the stronger one in the family.
>
> I felt so overwhelmed that I just lived for the weekend [when the children were with my ex-spouse]. And then they came back and its like, oh no! You know. And they were all; you know pretty loud [children] and everything and busy.

Sandra said she 'felt relief' when the children first went to live with her ex-spouse whose new wife cared for them. She volunteered that at first the children only lived ten minutes away so she saw them frequently and was still very involved in their lives.

Sandra said that when her new spouse was transferred north she was angry and bitter. She also said that after the move she resented that she couldn't see her children as often and, until the advent of unlimited calling, could not call them everyday. Today, all except one of the children continue to live with her ex-husband in Southern British Columbia. The other child is attending university in Southern British Columbia and lives independently. Sandra is currently working in industry and lives with her new husband who is employed as a professional in North Central British Columbia.

Discussion of my Co-Researchers' BackGrounds

Social class, ethnicity, and gender are part of the interlocking system of hierarchical domination that feminists study. They anticipate that studying the uneven distribution of power within each of these categories of social stratification will help them understand the overall system of domination.[2] They also believe that excluding a particular group's voice silences that group and denies their experiences.[3]

The six women who participated in my research all said they were of European descent. Five were born in Canada and one was born in Europe. Five women came from dysfunctional homes; another one grew up in a positive environment. Two mothers self-disclosed a history of childhood sexual abuse that may or may not have included alcoholic parents; one said her home was dysfunctional because of an alcoholic father, and another just stated that her home was dysfunctional. Additionally, one of my co-researchers identified as bi-sexual, and one said her ex-husband is gay. These differences appear to have had little impact on their experiences of being a mother who lives apart from her children.

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[2] Elizabeth Higginbothan, "Introduction" to Elizabeth Higginbotham & Mary Romero, *Women and Work: Exploring Race, Ethnicity, and Class* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), xvii.

[3] Dorothy E. Smith, "Introduction" to *The Everyday World as Problematic: A feminist Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 9.

In writing about social class John Porter said, "The most persistent image that Canadians have of their society is that it has no classes."[4] J. Ross Eshleman and Susannah J. Wilson state "When asked to what class they belong, most North Americans will probably respond 'middle.' Relatively few people can honestly respond 'wealthy,' and few people want to admit to being 'poor,' even if it is true."[5] As a feminist researcher who accepts people's view of their own reality, how do I solve this problem? How do I determine my co-researchers' social classes? I attempted to do this by asking them what class they were from. All but one of them, who said she was receiving welfare, said they were middle class.

Although my co-researchers responded as expected, I was surprised that each of them added a comment about why they believed that they were middle class. In several cases their comments did not support their beliefs. Instead they suggested that the woman belonged to the working class. Consequently, I will take a few moments to examine my co-researchers' comments about their social class. In the following discussion, I will use the categories wealthy, middle, working, and poor as put forth by Ross Eshleman and Susannah Wilson.[6] The poor social class includes those on welfare and those earning below the poverty level. Anne, who said she was on welfare, would be in this category. The working class or proletariat is paid by the hour or unit of work. They generally take orders rather than give them.[7] According to this classification, both Joan and Laura who are direct-care service

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[4] John Porter, "Class and Power: The Major Themes," in *The Vertical Mosaic: An analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 3.

[5] J. Ross Eshleman & Susannah J. Wilson, "Social-Class Impacts on Family Life," *The Family: Second Canadian Edition*, (Scarborough: Allyn & Bacon Canada, 1998), 128.

[6] John Porter, Ibid., and J. Ross Eshleman & S. J. Wilson, Ibid., 124-149, discuss three primary classes, working, middle, and wealthy. Poor, including those on social assistance are considered to be part of the working class. My co-researchers stated that "welfare families can not be part of the working class because they don't work." Class designation is usually based on the access to power through job status, wage or education level.

[7] J. Ross Eshleman & S. J. Wilson, Ibid., 130.

providers would be members of the working class, even though Joan stated, "I earn above the poverty line so I am middle class." The middle or professional class earns a salary and has more income stability than the working class. It generally refers to individuals employed as professionals.[8] Moreover, in our culture women are generally assigned the social class of their husband and are defined with respect to his accomplishments.[9] According to this classification, Bernice, Zaza, and Sandra, whose husbands all worked as professionals, would be classified as middle-class.

Feminists, such as Pat Armstrong and Bonnie Fox argue, however, against automatically classifying a woman by her spouse's class. They suggest that each woman should be categorised by her own circumstances and separately from her spouse.[10] Thus I have reconsidered the three women who live with their spouses in view of their specific situations. This includes how they do their housework, since housework is most often completed by women. While some feminists believe that people who do housework are from a single class, others suggest that how housework is done differs across social classes and that women who are primarily involved in it cannot be considered as being from a single class.[11] In view of my previous discussion, Sandra could belong to two classes. At work, her occupation places her in the working class because she takes rather than gives orders.[12] At home, taking into account her education and access to her spouse's income, she has choices similar to those of most other middle-class women in deciding how she will maintain her

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[8] Ibid., 128.
[9] Pat Armstrong & Hugh Armstrong, "Production and Reproduction: Breaking Tradition," in *Theorizing Women's Work* (Toronto: Garmond Press, 1990), 73.
[10] Bonnie J. Fox, "The Feminist Challenge: A Reconsideration of Social Inequality and Economic Development," in Robert J. Brym with Bonnie J. Fox, eds. *The Sociology of English Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), 121.
[11] Pat Armstrong & Hugh Armstrong, Ibid., 75, and J. Ross Eshleman & Susannah J. Wilson, Ibid., 129.
[12] J. Ross Eshleman & Susannah J. Wilson, Ibid., 130

home and whether or not she will participate in the paid labour force. Bernice's and Zaza's education and access to finances also give them the option to manage their homes similarly to other middle class women.[13]

Many feminists prefer to place women in a social class independent of their spouses. This is influenced by an awareness that social class or financial security based on a relationship with an intimate partner can change if the relationship dissolves and that all members of a household may not share equally in its resources.[14] My co-researchers' stories indicate that three mothers experienced downward mobility after they separated from their ex-spouses. One of them obtained higher education and remarried. These factors contributed to her re-joining the middle class.

Even though each of the six mothers has a different background and has a different perspective on life, they all share the experience of having lived apart from one or more children. Five came from dysfunctional homes some of which included alcohol abuse, child abuse, and sexual abuse, and only one mother's childhood home was functional. They came from at least two and possibly three social classes. These facts demonstrate that women who live apart from their children come from many groups including the dominant culture. This challenges the prevailing stereotypes about mothers who live apart from their children.

[13] Ibid., 129 & 131.
[14] Ibid., 147.

The Research Relationship

As I go about my daily activities, unplanned contacts with my co-researchers remind me of the paper written by Pamela Cotterill.[15] In it, she adds her comments to the debate about the relationship between feminist researchers and their participants. These are the four points she discusses. First, women share common experiences but this is not always sufficient to outweigh the barriers of social structures. Second, interviewing women can lead to friendship between researcher and co-researcher. Third, the researcher needs to examine her methods to ensure she is not exploiting participants to gain data. And fourth, the researcher may experience feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness.

Free Choice

The first point Pamela Cotterill discusses, that common experiences are insufficient to eliminate social barriers, prompts me to recall two of my potential interviewees. Both of these mothers contacted me in response to their care-providers drawing their attention to my posters. When they mentioned this fact during our initial contact, my instinct was to be cautious and ensure that they chose to participate freely. I arranged to take each woman a set of research papers before any interviews. At this time, I carefully advised each of them that I was not in contact with their care-provider and that, whether or not they chose to participate in my research, their relationship with their care-provider should not be affected. One of these mothers, who had no telephone, did not show up for the interview at a mutually agreed time and place. The second slept through my telephone call to confirm the interview. When I did contact her by telephone she declined

[15] Pamela Cotterill, "Interviewing Women: Issues of Friendship, Vulnerability, and Power," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 15 (1992): 593-606 discusses the relationships between the researched and researcher from the perspective of a feminist. In it, she explores power, vulnerability, and friendship in research relationships.

my offer to set another time. I had felt uneasy when these two women had initially contacted me and mentioned their care-providers involvement and I had mixed feelings about their withdrawal. I was disappointed because their non-participation meant that I would not be able to include their voices in my research. I also felt relieved, however, because I did not have to consider the ethical dilemma of how to determine whether they had made the decision to participate in my research of their own free will.

Ethics suggests that participants perceive themselves as able to make the choice to participate in research free of constraints.[16] Such constraints can include the perception of access or restriction to desired resources. Not all members of the public are aware that it is unethical to deny access to resources for failure to participate in research. Consequently, it behooves researchers to be especially careful about how they attract participants. My concern in this particular case was that the care-providers were very interested in my research and anxious to have this particular group of mothers included. They knew I was not getting any volunteers and wanted to help. I am confident that their intent and manner of asking was not coercive, but determining another person's perception is often difficult. When individuals are in positions with little power or control over their lives, they may be influenced by even the slightest chance of improving their image in another person's eyes. Paying individuals to participate in research can also influence some people to do things they would not be comfortable doing otherwise. Consequently, I chose not to pay women for participating in my research.

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[16] Jennifer Mason, "Generating Qualitative Data: Interviewing," in *Qualitative Researching* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 57.

Issues of Friendship

The second point Pamela Cotterill discusses is Ann Oakley's proposition that interviews can initiate friendship between the interviewee and the researcher.[17] I am in contact with two of my co-researchers on a regular basis; my friendship with one of them preceded my research. Some of Pamela Cotterill's friends also participated in her research and, because she fails to mention any changes in their relationships, presumably without incident. My interactions with the co-researcher I had a nodding acquaintance with before beginning my research continually demonstrated that she would like to deepen our friendship. Initially, I maintained a friendly professional relationship with her. However lately, seven months after her first interview, I have been responding to her offers of friendship in a more encouraging manner. I am confident that developing a friendship is her choice because she has continued to offer friendship despite my initial reluctance to respond. When I meet the other four women in public and they acknowledge me, I reciprocate in a friendly manner. Our conversations have remained superficial and I have respected their choice in setting that boundary. Pamela Cotterill says that women researchers need not feel that the research has failed if friendships do not develop. I concur. I feel it would be an unfair burden on both the research participants and the researcher if a commitment to be open to friendship were required when participating in research. On the other hand, an ethic that suggests that friendships should never develop denies the humanity and equality between participants and researchers. Co-researchers are similar in many respects to one's co-workers and fellow students. With some people we quickly develop a rapport that develops into friendship. With other people we are friendly but never develop a close relationship.

[17] Pamela Cotterill, Ibid., 595.

Researchers need to exhibit friendliness, but as Pamela Cotterill states, "women researchers need to distinguish between friendship and friendliness and not feel that [a] research relationship has somehow 'failed' if only the latter is achieved."[18]

Exploitation

The third point raised in Pamela Cotterill's essay is the moral issue of exploiting the researched to gain data. She supports the view that interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from researchers. I concur with her opinion. This was the reason I took the time to talk with two of my potential interviewees who later decided not to participate. Giving my co-researchers an opportunity to go through their transcripts and remove information they were uncomfortable with me using was another method I used to give them control over the data they contributed and reduce the likelihood of my exploiting them. Still another method I used to increase feelings of ownership was to encourage chats about my research and its purpose. As my journal entry at the beginning of chapter 3 indicates, my co-researchers often expressed distress that people were unaware of what it was like to be a mother without her children. Consequently, some co-researchers hoped my research would further their own agenda – that of educating the public. They frequently made comments that indicated that they equated negative judgements with an inadequate understanding of their situation. The following quotation from Laura's transcript is an example:

> And what they don't realise is that the children were stolen from me. And that is how I feel. We had an agreement. I made good on my end of the agreement, and he stole the children from me . . . And what people don't know is like when everybody is condemning me and stuff, I mean I need that break. I was a mom since I was 18. And that's ten years. And at that time (at the end of ten years) I needed to go back to school. I needed to get an education and a better job so that when the kids (came back) to live with me I wasn't on welfare . . . And I don't get it (the glare) so much any more because

[18] Pamela Cotterill, Ibid., 595.

> I mean people know. Enough people in this town know anyway why and what is going on. So I don't so much get it now.

My co-researchers' insights into why they were receiving negative judgements about themselves as mothers can be summarised as a lack of awareness by other people. This is congruent with the feminist philosophy that telling the stories of people who live on the margins will enable them to gain more power and move from the margins.[19] However, as Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook state, insight, theory work, and social action needs to be connected for change to occur in people's lives.[20]

Power And Vulnerability

The final point from Pamela Cotterill's paper that I wish to discuss is the vulnerability and powerlessness felt by the researcher. Rather than asking me specific questions about myself, my co-researchers often asked why I was interested in studying them as mothers. While I could have answered the question superficially, I felt it deserved an honest answer, and responded, "because I have been judged a 'bad mother' and would like to do something about women being labelled bad mothers." While I am comfortable talking about my children who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and being judged a bad mother, I had not anticipated the many comments about what direction that my research should take and felt responsible to meet my co-researchers suggestions. Unfortunately, these discussions were often held before or after the formal part of the interview and consequently I did not audio-tape them. As a result of the discussions I questioned whether my thesis topic was too narrow and if I should be broadening it to accommodate my co-researchers' requests.

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[19] Shulamit Reinharz, "Conclusions" to *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 251.

[20] Maria Mies & Andy Spencer, "Women's Research or Feminist Research?" in Mary Margaret Fonow & Judith Cook, eds. *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 67.

I felt powerless and vulnerable when I reflected on my research and my co-researchers' suggestions about additional research projects for several reasons. Specifically, I believe that in feminist research participants do and should have a say in what is studied and how it is studied and felt that if I took control I was not permitting them to have control. Further, I wondered what my co-researchers' responses might be if I did not accommodate their requests. Remembering my thesis supervisor's earlier comments and the material I read on researchers and power imbalances helped me work through my dilemma. First, when I was deciding on my research topic, my thesis advisor had suggested that, I needed to stay on track and keep my research focused so I could complete it. This comment appeared to me to be just as pertinent to my current concerns as it had been then. Second, Pamela Cotterill's article helped me recognise that, "when the researcher leaves the field and begins to work on the final account, the responsibility for how the data is analysed and interpreted is entirely her own."[21] Although I felt divided in taking the position that I am in control of my research project, I recognise its validity. If I had not taken control, I would not have finished a congruent readable product. In fact, it is likely that completing all of the research my participants suggested is the task of more than one person's lifetime. As a compromise, I have included my co-researchers' suggestions for further research wherever possible. I have also taken the time to analyse what they saw as their greatest needs and focus on these needs in writing up my research findings rather than on other areas that they felt were less important.

My co-researchers' principal reason for participating in my research, as I mentioned earlier, was to reduce the negative judgement they received. Other areas that they mentioned as important to them or causing them problems were a lack of information about

[21] Ibid., 604.

how mothers come to live apart from their children and about how they feel when this happens. My co-researchers' three areas of concern are related. A lack of information results in marginalisation, perpetuates negative stereotypes, and leads to judging individuals in accordance with those narrowly defined preconceived stereotypes rather than their actual lived experiences. Feminists and social psychologists agree that one of the best ways to change these misconceptions is to erode the myths that perpetuate the stereotypes by providing information. Feminist research further indicates that aware-ness moves people from the margins toward the centre of society where they are able to exercise more control over their lives.[22] Consequently, enabling mothers who live apart from their children to tell their own stories is one of the best methods to create social transformation.

My Co-Researchers' Stories of Separating from their Children

The six mothers who participated in my research as co-researchers had twelve children under the age of seventeen and lived apart from eight of them on the day of their initial interview. Most of them expressed anger at being constantly subjected to discriminatory remarks if their status as mothers was known and expressed a desire that people would not judge them. As Laura stated,

> When people start judging me, 'I say well who are you! You aren't here; you aren't walking with me. You know you are not walking in my shoes or beside me and don't understand. So please don't comment on something you have no idea what you're talking about!'

Educating the public, as Laura said she did at times and some of my other co-researchers were attempting to do on an individual basis, is one method of stopping negative social judgements. By writing about the lives of mothers who live apart from their children I hope

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[22] Anne Bishop, "Step 3: Consciousness and Healing" *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression* (Halifax, Fernwood Publishing, 1994), 79; Shulamit Reinharz, "Conclusions" to *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 251.

to enable these women's voices to be heard and challenge people's beliefs and help them become more accepting of mothers who live apart from their children.

Child's actions

Three mothers lived apart from their children because of their children's behaviours. There were two distinct forms of behaviour that resulted in separation. Two children lived apart from their mother for various periods of time because they chose to leave and did. Two more children's parents made the decision together with the Ministry of Children and Families for the child to live separate from them.

Child choose to leave

Anne had two of her children move out of her home and live apart from her. Her oldest child, who is now living independently, chose to move out when the child was thirteen. About this child leaving home Anne recalled:

> [My oldest child lived at home] till (s)he was about thirteen. [The child] says I kicked him/her out, I tell [the child] (s)he left. [The child's] been in places where I know it's been safe and secure for her/him. [My child] left because (s)he's very much like me. We argued an awful lot. (S)he grew up with a lot of my anger, which is unfortunate. And I used to think that I was crazy thinking that the reason that [my child] did that, you know that (s)he grew up with that anger was cause [my child] wasn't doing what (s)he was supposed to do. But then I really got in touch with it. What it boiled down to was that [my child] was not his/her own independent self. [My child] was an extension of who I am. And because what I was like when I was that young . . . . [my child] got a lot of garbage. (S)he got a lot of garbage. And I felt really really bad. And I've talked to [my child] for years now and explained to him/her that I'm really sorry. . . . [My child} blamed me for a lot of time.

Her second child moved out for a period of five months immediately preceding my research

> [My child] is sixteen. (S)he's been home until April. My child was gone from April 14 until September 7. (S)he was with [an adult friend from a community organisation]. And I dealt with the ladies there, and they thought it was okay because [my child] needed a safe place to be. . . . [My child's] biggest want at sixteen was freedom. "Well I want to go out with my friends." . . . [My child] came in late one night. And I said to [my child], "you

> think this is a bloody game don't you?" [My child] goes, "it's a game, you think this is a game. I'll show you a game." And [my child] stormed off and hasn't been home since. (S)he was staying with these people down the street. And they smoke a lot of pot apparently. [My child] was very very angry.

Both of Anne's children's stories of leaving are related to anger. However, two different things have happened. In her second child's case, Anne attributed her child's leaving to peer pressure and contact with drugs. In her oldest child's case, Anne stated that she thought that her problems with her past abuse affected her own emotional state, how she treated her child, and played a major role in the child's leaving home. Anne said that although she had tried to get help to deal with her problems earlier she was not completely successful. Two other women also mention that their past affected their ability to parent when they lived with their children. These three mothers' parenting difficulties point to a potential area for further research -- how to support the young woman who has herself received inadequate parenting in becoming a 'good enough parent'[23] and how to support teenagers who are going through personal difficulties.

A contributing factor that may have played a part in both of Anne's children leaving home the assistance rates for families on welfare. These rates are so low that a child may experience an improvement in living standards, and less to argue with parents about, when they are funded as a foster child rather than as a dependant.[24]

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[23] 'Good enough' is usually taken as the standard for adequate parenting. See Phyllis Chesler, "What is a Fit Mother and Father? An Unfit Mother and Father? Who Decides?" *Mothers On Trial: The Battle for Children and Custody* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), 60, 61.

[24] See Anne Bishop, "Understanding Different Oppressions," Ibid., 70 for a discussion of taking children from their natural parents and placing them in foster care. Several phone calls on May 7, 1999 to MC&F and Active Support Against Poverty revealed that foster parents are paid between $668.98 – 732.44 for an average child 12-19 years-old whereas parents receive assistance in the range of $140 – 379.00 for the same child.

Mother could not cope with child's behaviour

Bernice and Zaza both have one child who lives apart from them and other children who live with them. The Ministry of Children and Families was involved in both children initially leaving home and in their current living arrangements. An analysis of the separation of these children reveals several themes for further investigation.

First, both mothers mentioned that they realised that something was not right with their children as infants and that their concerns were ignored by their family doctors. The first mother stated that her family physician 'wouldn't do anything because he didn't recognise a problem. All he did was analyse our marriage.' She also stated that when she took her child to the homeopath at age seven:

> my child flipped. [My child] screamed at a high pitch, told the staff how unhappy (s)he was to be labelled, swore, and ran out of the back door. The doctor ran out and said, this is foetal alcohol, we've seen this before.' [My child] came back in fifteen minutes and was as calm as could be. When I went back to the family doctor he said he didn't see a problem.

The second mother also commented about being ignored by her family doctor when she attempted to draw his attention to the child's behaviour. Eventually both mothers' children were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and other mental health disorders.

Both Bernice and Zaza said that they asked for help from their family doctors before their child entered school. Moreover, early in their child's academic career they met with the school psychologist because of their child's behaviour, and eventually asked the Ministry of Children and Families for help. Both mothers were denied what they considered adequate help. When they could not find resources to keep both the child with behavioural

problems and their other children safe they made the choice for the child with the behavioural problems to live apart from them so that their other children were safe.

Jill Matthew's statement that, 'mothering became by definition an impossible task,' is perhaps truest in terms of raising children with behavioural problems associated with disabilities. In these cases, the mother customarily is found to be at fault.[25] My co-researchers' comments from my present study and those of my participants in an unpublished research project I completed as an undergraduate student on parenting children with ADHD, point to more research being needed about what it is like to be a mother with this kind of child and what resources mothers would find useful to support them in parenting these children. Anne's separation from her child at thirteen also suggest inadequate resources. I wonder what might have happened if these women had had the ongoing parenting support that I had from my counsellor? I suspect that the outcomes with their children might have been different.

Marital breakdown

The pre-conditions for five of the six women living apart from their children included marital breakdown. Two of my co-researchers identified some form of abuse as the reason they chose to divorce their spouses. The other three women did not discuss the reasons for their marital breakdowns. Here are a few examples of the abuse that these two women experienced:

> Some friends actually sensed that maybe [my husband] was probably gay so they obviously could see something that I could not see. But yes, I could kind of sense something inside that something was not right. His male friends seemed to have priority over me, even when I was sick. . . . When I had my

[25] For a discussion of good mothers raising good children see Jill Matthews, "Ideology," in *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 78-79, and "Mothering," Ibid., 183-186.

> miscarriage it was not his priority to stay with me that night. He took his motorbike and went to visit a male friend.
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> [my husband] was not always available [and] I didn't feel valued. . . . He had been sort of ruling the house kind of thing. All the affairs of the house and so on. . . . . I could see some of the silent treatment and sulking. . . . after I awhile I would go back and try and make it better, taking the responsibility for his stuff. You see [my husband] was more of a subtle controller. He was emotionally manipulative.
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> He was very abusive, not physically, never physically hit me. . . . I can't say he wasn't physical because he used to rape me all the time. We'd go to bed, and I'd wake up at whatever time and he was having sex with me. And it got to the point where I stopped waking up. [Researcher, "You'd just turn it off?"] Yeah, . . . that is how I ended up pregnant with my daughter.
>
> [He was emotionally abusive,] from the time that we were together, I mean the entire time we were together, I was stupid, useless, or you can be replaced. And it didn't matter at all who was there. He did it with my parents around: he did it with my friends around. It didn't matter at all who was there.

These examples show some of the type of emotional and physical abuse that my co-researchers left behind when they separated from their partners. In the first mother's case, the abuse had so eroded her self-esteem that she did not attempt to take the children with her although she had originally planned to do so. She recalled, "So what he said is, 'that if you try and take those kids I'll fight for them.' And in those days, I was not strong enough emotionally. And I believed that he meant it, since after all he had been sort of ruling the house kind of thing – all the affairs of the house and so on."

In each of the five instances where separation from children was related to the pre-condition of separation from spouse some form of abuse can be identified either on the spouse's part, in the mother's childhood home, or both. Here is an example shared by one woman of the emotional and financial abuse that resulted in her children living with her ex-spouse:

> He phoned me up one night and he was drunk and he was yelling and screaming at me and he said that I get paid $550 a month to raise the children

> and I better damn well do that right. And I said if you think it is so easy to do it on $550 a month here take the kids for a year. So he hummed and hawed, and about two months after I said that he came and got the kids . . . And what people don't know is like when everybody is condemning me and stuff, I mean I needed that break, I mean I've been a mom since I was 18. And that's ten years. And at that time I needed to go back to school, I needed to get an education and a better job so that when the kids did come to live with me I wasn't on welfare. I had no skills as such. Hum, I mean I was a . . . And I didn't want that career. And emotionally I couldn't deal with it no more. He had beaten me to a pulp emotionally. Oh, you're a bad mother, you're this, you're that.

After this telephone conversation between the mother and her ex-spouse, they made a legal agreement that he would care for the children for a year and return the children at the end of the year after she had completed her training. About half way through the year he went to court and gained full custody of the children. This woman reported that when she tried to contest this, her legal aid lawyer said, "well you don't have a hope in hell of getting the kids back because you let them go to begin with." This situation demonstrates that mothers who have custody of their children are not necessarily supported by their communities or the courts to care for themselves so they are better able to care for their children. It also demonstrates the risks in allowing a partner to temporarily care for a child when a mother eventually wants to regain custody.

Only one mother in my research mentioned regaining custody in similar circumstances. She said that although neither of her children were her ex-spouse's, that the Ministry of Children and Families arranged for her ex-spouse and his new partner, a hooker, to care for her children while she obtained some emotional help to deal with her past abuse and attended school. While she received some help with her issues, she did not return to school. Further, her ex-spouse and his new partner applied to adopt her children before she was ready to resume parenting them. When she went to court about the adoption, this mother stated that the court worker said to her,

> 'how do you feel about this?' And I said, 'I don't like it.' He says, 'well I want to talk to you.' So he kicked them out [her ex-spouse and new partner]. And he talked to me. And he said, 'it's within my power to say yeah or neigh to this. And you know the circumstances are this, that you just needed some time to deal with you abuse issues. Not give your child[ren] up.'

After speaking to the woman privately, the court worker arranged for Ministry of Children and Family to do a house check and return the children to her. In the patriarchal hierarchy of value, prostitutes are less worthy to be mothers than are women on welfare.[26] I wonder what might have happened concerning the return of this mother's children to her if her ex-spouse had been the children's biological father or if she had been the prostitute and her ex-spouse's partner had been on social assistance.

My Co-Researchers' Response to the Separation

The responses of my co-researchers to separation included initial reactions of relief, loss, and anger. Often they had feelings of guilt about abandoning their children. Frequently they felt anger and resentment with their ex-spouses' parenting behaviour. Many of the mothers expressed initial feelings of shame, followed by eventual acceptance of the separation.

In response to my question, "could you tell me about your experiences about living apart from your children?" several of the mothers mentioned feeling relieved. Sandra's response is typical. She said, "I felt relief. Like I felt oh, whew! I felt so overwhelmed that I just lived for the weekends. And then they come back and its like, Oh no! . . . And so I was relieved." Zaza's response was also one of relief that her difficult child was no longer disrupting her relationship with her husband and other children. Here are some of her comments:

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[26] Ibid., "Sexuality," 123.

> And I am not sorry. And I feel guilty for not feeling sorry. You know, I am so relieved. And I am so glad that she doesn't live with me. . . And I don't know how to explain it, it's like all the air got let back into my house. Do you understand? It's like there is oxygen in it now. We can breathe.

Both mothers are talking about the relief they felt when they were no longer required to provide full-time child-care. Our culture expects mothers to care for all of their children's needs while making few allowances for their own needs.[27] Laura's insights about the situation draws attention to some of our society's unrealistic expectations for mothers.[28] Here are some of her comments about what happened if she went to a coffee shop while she was on welfare and cared for her children full-time:

> [People would say,] 'Oh my god! I can't believe it. Look she's in the coffee shop! She doesn't have her kids!' 'I mean, who's got your kids? Welfare must be paying for her kids to be with a sitter.' Oh yeah! I mean I love my children but seven days a week, 24 hours a day. I mean at some point I need a break. And I'll take it. I don't think twice about taking a break. . . There is days when you do not take the break because you know you cannot afford to.

The initial relief some of the mothers expressed at finally having a break and not being overwhelmed by child-care responsibilities was, however, short-lived. Guilt and a deep sense of loss often followed.

Guilt and loss were the two predominant feelings of the mothers who were separated from their children. The loss was related to the grief over missing their children and their own role as mothers (see Figure 2). The guilt was related to how they judge themselves as mothers who were not fulfilling their internalised role and causing pain to those they love. Often the two were intertwined with anger so that it was difficult to

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[27] Jill Matthews, ibid., and Marlee Kline, "Complicating the Ideology of Motherhood: Child Welfare Law and First Nation Women," *Queens Law Journal* 2 (1993), 311.
[28] Ibid., discusses 'The Dominant Ideology of Motherhood.'

Figure 2: No longer a mother.

distinguish what behaviours were driven by grief and loss or by anger and guilt. Here are examples of how the mothers felt when they became separated from their children:

> Sadness, the void you feel. That there is a piece of you missing, you know. And there is. You know your role is totally switched. Where before your day was dictated by your kids and [your] mind was always
>
> filled with thoughts of them, what they are going to eat, what they are going to wear, do they need boots, do they . . . ? That's always in there you know. You just never don't think about them. And then when you don't have that, there is that huge hole like.
>
> I don't consider what I'm doing a parent. I'm not a parent anymore. I'm somebody that the kids come over and spend time with and ask for money from. That's who I am. And that's my own fault I guess for letting this happen. . . . It isn't my fault that the circumstances were there, but it is my fault for allowing the circumstances to control what happened. That's the difference. . . . A lot of anger too. This would have never happened if I would have got proper child support. . . . that is not my fault. I wanted to play nice. I didn't want to play hardball. . . . It's my own fault. I let him manipulate me.
>
> And I fluctuate between real anger . . . and now I just feel a lot of loss. And you feel very sorry for the child . . . I'm just sorry that (s)he has made these choices [this child lives apart from his/her parents so that (s)he does not hurt the younger children in the family.]
>
> It's hell. . . . When (s)he was nine-months old and my [other child] was five, they went to live with my ex-husband. It was tough; I was a weekend parent for awhile. Yeah, it was really, really tough. I don't think, if they hadn't come home, I don't believe I would have had a reason to live at that point in my life. I was living for them. . . . There is a lot of my own abandonment issues that came up [from childhood abuse]. I mean I haven't given it a lot of thought but I probably had always thought that they were going to be here.
>
> I think my feelings now are not as painful as they used to be. They used to be very painful. When I left, and especially when I had to take my youngest . . . back to his/her father. Because I took him/her with me for about a month and then I took him/her back to her dad. That was very painful because (s)he did not understand. And I could see that my children did not understand and that really did hurt so bad. It felt that something inside really did die. . . . And it was very painful so my way of dealing with some of that was to, I was with a boyfriend at the time, and that was kind of to focus my attention on him. And

> you know, kind of leading a wild lifestyle, wild because he was abusive. Yeah.[29]

> Well it is like making Sophie's choice, it is like the woman who had to decide which child to leave in the concentration camp and which one to take with her. And that always stuck with me. What a horrible choice. It's the same thing. You are condemning your child to a group home where [the child] wanders forth, where there is no parent.[30]

I feel little analysis is needed of the mothers' feelings because of the poignancy of their stories. Two things appear to affect my co-researchers' affective state. First, some of their feelings of guilt seem to result from their internalisation of society's beliefs about what a mother is and how she cares for her children. Second, they accept responsibility for the separation from their children, even though they often had very little choice in the decision to live separately from their children. An example is the second women in the previous list blaming herself for not being able to resist her ex-spouse's abusive manipulation.

In chapter 4, I look at my co-researchers' understanding of who a mother is, and discuss how they have come to terms with their feelings about the separation, and society's responses to them.

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[29] Joan's experiences of using a wild lifestyle to help deal with the pain are similar to what some of the women in a previous unpublished research project told me their responses had been to being separated from their children.

[30] In referring to Sophie's choice Bernice is recalling the novel by William Styron, Sophie's Choice which is now also out in video format. The story line is that the mother must choose, instead of the SS officer, which one of her children will die and which will live. The novel is described in Jane Swigart, "On Fathers and Male Mothers: The Myth of The Bad Father," *The Myth of the Bad Mother, Parenting without Guilt* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 135 & 136.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN OF COURAGE & AGENCY

> . . . and then after I left my kids, then I felt that I no longer had the right to be called a mother because I had lost the role of a mother. So therefore, it's like why hold onto a role. So then, but then I realised that to be a mother is more than a role, it's really it's part of who I am. It's part of my soul. It's part of it, because those children are not just children. They come from me. So there is more of a bond that cannot be defined by a role. So to be a mother really is not what I do and what I did but it's really who I am.
>
> Joan

One of my acquaintances suggested a new name, "women of courage," for my thesis because in our culture it takes courage to live as a mother without one's children. The mothers I interviewed are pioneers in a sense. They are women of courage who are seeking to find their place in a culture that marginalises them while denying or denigrating their status as mothers. In this respect, they recognise, as bell hook states, that "opposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one has resisted there is still the necessity to become—to make oneself anew."[1] In seeking to 'make themselves anew' the six mothers I interviewed each developed an 'oppositional worldview.'

My co-researchers are pioneers in resisting the colonisation of their minds by the dominant culture's ideology about mothers. They used several strategies in their resistance. One strategy I explored in Chapter 3 was the women's decision to make their stories visible so that their experiences could no longer be denied. A second strategy is to challenge the stereotypes held about them as members of a particular group. Research from the margins can assist individuals or groups to identify where they are already using these last two resistance strategies and help them find additional sites of resistance. To do so, researchers

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[1] bell hook, "The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity," *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 15.

use creative analyses and critical thinking. These processes encourage the researcher to set aside their personal assumption and examine their observations in a new way that "make [s] sense of the information gained in the research process without imposing definitive conclusions."[2] In this chapter, I use these processes to develop an awareness of my co-researchers' experiences of marginalisation and their resistance strategies, and to suggest alternate explanations for their experiences than those they shared with me.

Marginalisation

Thus far in my thesis, I have implied that mothers who live apart from their children are an oppressed and marginalised group. I have not, however, put forth any evidence to show that mothers who live apart from their children are such a group. Being outside of the main body, or 'on the margins,' often means that the experiences and reality of marginalised groups are denied. Denial can mean not acknowledging something or interpreting it from a different viewpoint than the person experiencing it.[3] Members of marginalised groups often deny their own experiences by interpreting them from the perspective of the dominant group. Their minds have been, as discussed by bell hook, colonised so that they no longer have a place of resistance.[4] Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna label this type of behaviour as 'doublethink/doublespeak'[5] It is a survival strategy that abused people typical use.[6]

To develop my awareness of my co-researchers' experiences of marginalisation, I looked at their stories of discrimination and oppression. In examining their stories I found

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[2] Janice L. Ristock and Joan Pennel, "Creative Analyses," *Community Research as Empowerment: Feminist Links, Postmodern Interruptions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79, and Patricia Maquire, "Paradigms and Research: Different Lenses for Viewing Reality," *Doing Participatory Research: a feminist approach* (Amherst: The Centre for International Education, 1987), 14.

[3] Anne Bishop, *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1994).

[4] bell hook. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," Ibid., 150..

[5] Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, "Introduction" to *Experience Research Social Change: Methods From the Margins* (Toronto: Garmond Press, 1989), 24.

examples of invisibility, isolation, silencing, internalised guilt, negative social judgement, and reduced agency, all symptoms of oppression that can be caused by discrimination.

Invisibility

The media portrays mothers with their children. It does not include the message that some mothers live apart from their children. For example, television and magazine advertisements show women in parks with children, women baking cookies with children, women calling young adults or their grandchildren on the telephone, and women doing laundry for children. None show women calling their own young children long distance, sending parcels to them, or picking out cards for them. The implicit message is that the part-time or absent mother does not exist. That is what some of my co-researchers believed. Joan stated, "I felt that I was the only one. When I left, I felt that no mothers left their children. I felt that I had done something very bad. And obviously nobody, I mean, that there were not that many people who did things like that." Joan delivered her words to me in a lifeless voice. In telling me of her experience it was as though she were reliving it – and part of her had died. In fact, in describing her feelings she said, "it felt that something inside really did die." Invisibility, that denies the reality, such as what Joan describes, is one of the effects of marginalisation that I discussed in Chapter 1.

Isolation

For marginalised people, invisibility and isolation often co-exist. Isolation can be a result of external or internal forces. Bernice stated that her isolation was enforced by a school policy that prevented her from entering the school her child attended. Here is her description of this event:

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[6] Judith Lewis Herman, "Introduction" to *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 1.

> And then when they take the child which is most difficult -- the most hurtful part is that all those activities you poured yourself into doing with your child, you can't go to the activities. That is what hurts the most. You can't go to the activities. And also you are losing your life. People say well do something else. You're losing your friends, you lose your companions. You lose your soul-mates, the people that you talk to, the mothers that have other children that you socially maybe talk to. . . You lose your life!

Bernice is describing exclusion from her child's school that resulted in role loss and isolation from her friends. Joan mentioned choosing to isolate herself to prevent further negative interaction and the subsequent pain. She stated:

> So in fact I kept away from women in general because of the experiences of being judged. And that would be very shattering, you know. It would reinforce more and more the guilt to have done something like that. And then it would send me into a spell of depression again. So eventually I choose to keep away from the wound, you know from the pain, from the people who could bring on more pain.

These two women's experiences demonstrate that isolation for mothers who live apart from their children can result from shunning as well as internalised overpowering feelings of guilt at being "the only" mother who does not live with her child(ren). The belief that one is "the only one" may be related to the invisibility of mothers who live apart from their children.

Internalised Guilt

Most of my co-researchers mentioned feeling guilty or blaming themselves because they did not live with their children. When I asked Sandra about her experiences of disapproval from society, she responded: "How did I feel about it? Just how could you explain yourself? You feel bad, you feel guilty. As if you don't have enough guilt in your life you know. So that is about it – guilty as charged!" Joan volunteered that she felt so guilty about leaving her children that she even initiated negative social interactions. About her experience she said:

> It's like I, in fact, just told everything to the people. It was like [I was] waiting for them to do the punishing. And I guess it worked to some extent. I felt hurt, maybe it's not always punishing that I felt, maybe I was hurting and so desperate that maybe I was looking for someone who could be kind and really help me to understand. But sometimes that is not the opinion, the feeling that I did get. And it would be very painful, my way of dealing with some of that.

"Guilty as charged" and "waiting for them to do the punishing" are expressions that acknowledge my co-researchers' acceptance of their failure to comply with the socially accepted role of motherhood.[7] These remarks demonstrate that my co-researchers had, at that point in their lives, internalised our culture's beliefs about mothers and that they blamed themselves for their situation.

Negative Social Judgement

My co-researchers' feelings of isolation and self-incrimination were compounded by negative social judgement. In response to my question, "could you tell me about any experiences of disapproval you received from society?" each of the women had at least one example of negative social judgement. One mother's succinctly summarised her experiences for me, stating:

> How many hundreds do you want to hear? Like there is all kinds. Well I'll just give you a couple. How about, oh they want to know how come you don't have your kids. And then you hear, 'I could never leave my kids.' . . . It's stuff like that, you hear that. I mean there are hundreds, but they are not all that different. 'Like how could you? What kind of mother are you?' All that stuff.

The above mother seemed aware that the negative comments she received had common

[7] Jill Matthew, "Mothering," in *Good and Mad Women: The Historiacl Construction of Feminity in Twentieth-Century Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 173-197, explores the concept of the 'good mother' by analysing why women who were hospitalised for psychiatric care were considered 'bad' or deviant mothers..

themes. Here are some additional examples my co-researchers shared with me about the negative comments they received:

> I found that the attitude was really judgemental, condemning. I felt judged by women as in, 'how dare you abandon your children.' And men thought that obviously if I had abandoned my kids I was a whore (see Figure 3).[8]
>
> I had a friend who was [from a different country]. After I left, I phoned her and she told me, "[my husband] does not want you to come back in the house anymore." Really that was maybe him, but that was also her.
>
> So I have lost some friends, who [were] really close friends. [When one] found out that I had left she said that, "how can you abandon your children?"
>
> I wouldn't say society gives you lots of support, you lose friends all right!
>
> I mean the kids know that daddy's family hates mummy. You know, they [think I] should have never left him. [They say that] he was the best thing that ever happened to me. And financially, yeah he was. But emotionally he was not!
>
> Some judgemental things, you know, like discussing children in front of me.
>
> And my parents would phone me up and say, "Do you know the kind of people she's associating with in that group [home]?" And I'd say, "mom for god's sake you know, [my child] is one of those kind of people." Because my parents were thinking this poor angelic child that she's in this horrible environment. And to try and make them understand that [my child] is one of the worst of the bunch.

Mothers also mentioned 'the look' in response to my question, "what happens if you tell somebody that your kids are living separate from you?" Here is one mother's description of 'the look':

> You know that look that you give or you get, when somebody says like oh yeah, what did you do? I get that look of aren't you a good enough mother to have your children? . . . What did you used to do, hit your kids? And I get that look of where do you get off giving away your children from men.

While each of the mothers appeared to experience "the look," one women's experiences of social stigmatisation were unique to her. This woman was the only mother who said that she

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[8] Anne Bishop, "Step 2: Understanding Different Oppressions," Ibid., 68.

Figure 3: Whore

"mostly supported her family and herself on welfare." In the following comments she clearly states that mothers are stigmatised for being on welfare:

> I've heard, "I paid for the likes of you living on welfare. I'm a working person, and I'm paying for you to be on welfare." . . . Well, [they mean that] I'm a poor parent because I'm on welfare. I'm not out there working.
>
> But with my [older child] I got flack. Because I was not a good parent. Because [the assumptions was that] had I been a good parent, at 13 my god (s)he wouldn't have been out there. [The flack was] verbal, tough verbalisation. I won't say abuse, but tough verbalisations. Degrading, who I was. Just a lot of verbiage from people that believe that I shouldn't have stayed on welfare raising my kids. And that my daughter should be at home with me. . . . There was a lot of flack in regards [to my] raising my kids, whether my kids have been at home or not at home – it's because I've been on the welfare.

This mother's comments indicate that she was stigmatised for being on welfare and because her one child did not live with her. Although there is likely an interaction between the two forms of stigmatisation, I feel that I have insufficient information to examine the interaction and will not do so.

My co-researcher also shared comments about negative social judgement with me when I inquired about support. It appears that some of my co-researchers found some of their caregivers' responses to their situation as less than supportive. Examples my co-researchers interpreting their caregivers' behaviour as judgmental or non-supportive include:

> What a hoot! Are you kidding! All they do is say well maybe you should sort of get on with life. Nothing!
>
> [the professional care providers] didn't know how to react. They didn't know what to say. And these are professional people who should know better. Who ought to know and who simply didn't know the emotional process, nor did they know anything about the legal process. Or what it was doing to the family. They were totally ignorant. And yet they're counsellors and teachers. So I find that very surprising. That they don't know more.
>
> And [when they take your child] you are given no thanks for what you have done up to that point. You are treated like a piece of rubber. And you are

> expected to feel like a piece of rubber. Just [like a piece of rubber so] they can kick you and you bounce.
>
> Because then, they're all like, 'you and your husband must go for counselling. Cause there is obviously a problem here. And (laughter) I don't mind the counselling bit. But to blame me! When I have two other children that have no problems.
>
> [my family doctor] said there wasn't a problem because he didn't see the behaviour. All he did was analyse our marriage.

Some of these comments suggest that their caregivers had insufficient information about mothers who live apart from their children. With only unfounded stereotypes and sketchy information available about an event in people's lives it is difficult for anyone, including counsellors, to help an individual accept their experiences as a normal part of life rather than a unique event. If these mothers were not marginalised, there would be more awareness of their actual experiences. Perhaps then their caregivers would be less apt to make negative judgements and more willing to listen and validate these mothers' experiences.

Many of the negative comments my co-researchers received suggest that the individuals making the statement were attempting to differentiate themselves from a mother who abandons her children. Differentiating oneself to create an 'other' group can serve two purposes. First, it can help the oppressors deny their own vulnerability and the humanity of the other person. In denying the experiences of the "other" they often force the "other" to deny their own experiences. This is a form of the double/speak double/think that I discussed earlier. My research suggests that some of my co-researchers were engaging in this behaviour. Second, as Anne Bishop states, creating an "other" helps the dominant group maintain control and reserve resources for their own purposes.[9] The cumulative effects of

[9] Ibid, 71. This comment is consistent with Anne Bishop's statement that, "In [her] experience, every oppressed group has been assigned at least one false negative belief related to sexuality."

individuals differentiating themselves from 'others' is injustice and inequality.[10]

Silencing

The multitude of negative responses these mothers received seemed to precipitate one response from my co-researchers – silence. Several of them stated that they learned that the best method to avoid the negative statements about their mothering was to keep silent. Here are two women's comments:

> I don't usually tell very many people. Unless I get to know them well.
>
> I don't tell too many people. Because people get horrified. I'm very careful about who I discuss this with. . . . A lot of people think I only have [this number of] children. They don't realise that I, unless I know them for a long time, that I have [more] kids.

Remaining silent, because they risk negative judgement if they do not, likely contributes to two other effects these mothers experience. First, not talking about their experiences as mothers perpetuates the lack of knowledge available about their experiences. Second, it enforces their isolation or feelings of disconnection from other people and reduces their ability to advocate on their own behalf. Silencing is also a form of doublethink/doublespeak because it results in individuals either not acknowledging or setting aside their own understandings of their experiences.

Reduced Agency

Reduced agency can contribute to the feeling of powerlessness in mothers who live apart from their children. This can further restrict their available options or their ability to identify their available options. A reduction in available options diminishes their ability to

[10] Ibid., "Step 1: Understanding Oppression – How is it held in place?" 37.

make wise choices for themselves and their children and can create a space where they must use doublethink. For mothers who live apart from their children this type of oppression may include denying their feelings and experiences, denying them an opportunity to be active agents in their children's lives, and restricting their choices of conversation topics and volunteer activities.

Denying feelings can take two forms. First, it can silence or prevent individuals from voicing their feelings or talking about their experiences. An example is one mother's comment, "there are a lot of women out there that look at me and think, 'wow, look at how free she is.' I am free. About as free as you can be with that kind of stuff carrying around in your spirit." She said that with this type of response that she did not feel free to talk about her loss nor to acknowledge her pain. Second, feelings are denied when someone is told how they can feel. And example is the comment, "[a mother] can grieve but she has to have her guilt." Although guilt can be part of the grief cycle, it is not the only part. If people expect a mother without her children to feel guilty, they may interact with her in a manner that prevents her from experiencing her full range of emotions and moving forward through the other stages of the grief cycle.[11]

Living apart from their children reduces a mother's agency in two areas. First, not being with them on a daily basis, an obvious consequence of a mothers not having custody of their children, restricts their ability to be part of their children's lives. Several mothers mentioned being angry and sad as a result. One mother said, "you really miss those firsts [steps, words, day at school, etc.] with the kids and being there with them." Another mother

[11] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, "Letting Go," in *On Children and Death* ((New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1983), 170.

mentioned feeling guilty because she had not been there to support her daughter when the kitchen caught on fire.

A second consequence of living apart from their children for these mothers was that they were often unable to influence their children's environment. Here are a few examples of their comments about being excluded from making decision on their child's behalf:

> You feel isolated and not part of your children's lives.
>
> The one nanny had friends over that I disapproved of. And although it wasn't my home it's my children. And I do have a say. Like I mean, the one friend, I knew, used pot. And I asked her very politely, please do not bring my children over to [your] house. And I was told flat out by the nanny, "I'll do whatever I want. You are not here." I have no control.
>
> And it is very frustrating and you get very angry because you see social workers making decisions when they don't know what they are doing. Well they don't know half of what they are dealing with. They'll tell you that your child is doing very well. Doing just fine! You know that's not so. They hand you out lots of BS. That's what they do. They just want to tell you what they want to tell you, because they don't want to tell you the truth.

These two mothers seem to be expressing feelings of powerlessness. Another mother mentioned feeling powerless because she could not support her children in times of crisis. She stated:

> If the kids go into the hospital – I don't hear about it. You know, something happens at school – I don't hear about it. [This mother said she was angry because she was unable to support her children when she was not notified what was happening for them.]

These few examples suggest that these mothers feel powerless and have little agency in some situations where collaboration with their children's caregivers would be possible and may benefit the children.

My co-researchers also mentioned that their opportunities to participate in casual conversation or volunteer activities were restricted. One mother said that because she

received negative judgement when she mentioned her children she was "really hesitant to discuss it with people." Two other women mentioned their difficulties with causal conversation. They said:

> I don't like it because what is one of the most asked questions you get when people know you have kids. Oh, how many? And I don't like the feeling that I have to dissemble and hide things. And watch what I say.
>
> So I kept away from women in general because of the experiences of being judged.

Several of the mothers mentioned that it was okay to talk with one's friends about an adult child who lived apart from them, whereas it was not okay to talk about a younger child who lived apart from them. The mothers who mentioned this said they were pleased with this change in their situation and looked forward to sharing conversations with their friends about about their children. Their optimism about the future, however, did not appear to negate their resentment about their past or current situation.

Two mothers' comments suggest that living apart from their children initiated discrimination that controlled their behaviour. Another mother mentioned that living apart from her child meant that her volunteer activities were restricted at her children's school and at church. She said that she was not permitted to teach Sunday school for her church, a volunteer position in which she would have liked to participate. About this restriction she said, "if they needed somebody to teach children [at church], I was not the one that was called, let's put it that way. In desperation they would seek out overworked, over-busy people, who really didn't have the time for a commitment." The other mother mentioned that living apart from her children appeared to give some men the message that she was 'available.' She said that "men thought that obviously if I had left my children I was a whore" and that at times she experienced a great deal of pressure to participate in sexual

relationships with men after they discovered she lived apart from her children. She also said that at times her self-esteem was so low that she had given in to the pressure to conform to the men's expectations and now felt guilty about having had unprotected sex and about her decision to participate in it.

Marginalisation, as I discussed in Chapters I and 2, denies people's experiences and prevents their perspectives from being included when public policy is formulated or when people form their schemas about them. Denying people's experiences moves them toward the margins and reduces their agency. My research suggests that the six mothers I interviewed were experiencing marginalisation. Specifically they experienced negative social judgements and stigmatisation for not meeting our cultural norms relating to motherhood to a degree that reduced their agency. They also experienced isolation, silencing, and inability to make decisions that affected themselves or their children. These mothers' experiences of marginalisation and oppression appeared to be increasing their pain. Their marginalisation also appeared to create a 'spirit of resistance' in them.

Sites of Resistance

"Cultural criticism" can help oppressed minorities resist domination by the dominant culture.[12] It is a "practice of critique and analysis that . . . disrupt(s) and even deconstruct(s) those cultural productions that were designed to promote and reinforce domination,"[13] The intent of this resistance is to:

> create an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualisation? . . . .

[12] bells hooks, "Liberation Scenes," in *Yearning race, gender, and cultural politics* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 3.
[13] Ibid.

> There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion. . . . . That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains! It is different then to talk about becoming subjects. That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined."[14]

It appears that as the initial pain subsided after the separation from their children, each of my co-researchers found a space to resist the dominant ideology of what is a 'good mother.' Examining their stories for sites of resistance I found that they used creativity to identify and use support systems, develop alternate interpretations about events in their lives, and identify spaces to nurture their children. Each of these methods reduced their oppression and increased their feelings of being a competent mother.

Identifying and Using Available Support

Support in an atmosphere where negative reactions are anticipated provided positive respite. My research suggests that identifying and remembering even the small bits of support so that they could remind themselves of it in difficult times was one positive coping strategy these women used to care for themselves and resist internalising the message that they were 'bad mothers.' My co-researchers identified and used family members, friends, support groups, and counsellors for support. Several of the mothers received support from more than one source. However, there was no common theme of where my co-researchers found support and some women could recall no incidents of support (see Figure 4).

I feel it is important to share my co-researchers' positive experiences of support for two reasons. First, their experiences are examples of what mothers who live apart from their children perceive as positive support. And second, their experiences of support are like rays

[14] Ibid., "The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity," 15.

Figure 4: Support ?

of light at the end of a tunnel – they provide hope. The support these mothers received suggests that if some members of our society can accept and support women who are participating in alternate forms of mothering, perhaps our society's expectations of mothers are changing. It also suggest that perhaps as a community someday we will be able to accept mothers who live apart from their children as participating in just another form of acceptable parenting. If and when this occurs, mothers who live apart from their children will be able to move closer to the centre of society where more lifestyle choices are available and less oppression occurs.

My co-researchers viewed support from family members and friends that included acceptance positively. Zaza mentioned her partner's family as being very good at accepting what happened and supporting her. She quoted their words as, "You know, Zaza, it is not your fault. We don't blame you." She also mentioned her friend as a source of support when she said, "It doesn't bother me as much as it would otherwise because people like my best friend who have known me for a long time know. I get such support." Anne received some support from her mother. She stated, "yeah, she [my mother] gave me some [support]. We don't talk very often, but the couple of times we did." One woman's sister also lives apart from her children. The woman said that her sister expressed so much guilt about the situation, however, that she did not find her supportive. These women's comments suggest that acceptance explicitly stated and a lack of negative judgement are two appreciated characteristics of support.

One co-researcher mentioned using a support group to obtain help. She said that I could share the following anecdote to show that a woman can change her behaviour if she chooses to do so. Here are her words about her experiences when she first left her children:

> And I could see that my children did not understand and that really did hurt so bad. It felt that something inside really did die . . . . And it was very painful, so my way of dealing with some of that was to, I was with a boyfriend at the time, and that was kind of to focus my attention on him. And you know, kind of leading a wild lifestyle, wild because he was abusive . . . .

This mother also mentioned that she had been extremely depressed and felt very guilty about leaving her children. She said that her 'abusive' boyfriend and her addictions were ways of dulling the pain. She mentioned finding an advertisement for a support group after she had lived apart from her children for a time. About finding it she said:

> The only breakthrough happened when I came across an article in [my community] about a support group for mothers without children. But by then a lot of the excruciating pain of the beginning had lessened a little bit. But that I think to just see the name on the bulletin board that such a group existed, I didn't feel so bad. And I didn't feel that I was the only one. It had happened to other women and that validated my experience.

This woman said that after she had received some support, "she let go of most of her addictions and is no longer addicted to sex." This woman said her experiences with the group were positive and thought that groups might be a useful method of providing support for mothers who live apart from their children. She also said that she had used other forms of support after the group ended.

Support from counsellors or other care-providers was valuable when it was available. However, only three women including the previously mentioned one said that they received this form of support. Two women said that their counsellors provided validation and acceptance for them when they first separated from their children. This appeared to help them accept their feelings about living apart from their children and adjust to the situation. Sandra's experience is an example of minimal counsellor intervention, which was beneficial. She said,

> some counsellor like when he found out what was going to happen he suggest[ed] I get this book. And that is the "Weekend Parent". It is really good. And he said, 'maybe you should look into counselling after, because it's going to be harder than you think.' And I remember that. But I didn't go for counselling. But he was right. It was harder than I thought it would be.

Sandra's counsellor's words, that "It's going to be harder than you think," helped prepare her for her feelings and to accept them as normal. Anne's experience with counsellors was more extensive. She responded to my question of receiving support when her sixteen-year- old child left home by saying,

> yes, the counsellor at [an association] that we had been dealing with. I was able to keep in touch with him a couple of times. In fact he snagged my husband off the street one day and told him, 'I just want you to know you are not alone in this.' And it made him a lot better. It helped him to understand a lot more things.

Her comments demonstrate that, when an older child leaves home of his/her own accord, parents still may feel guilty and isolated and appreciate a counsellor's support. Anne also talked about the support she received from a counsellor when her children lived with her ex-husband as pre-schoolers. About this counsellor she said, "And they sent me this wonderful little man, who is too nice. Very sensitive. I cried and he cried. But he was a lifesaver. He would talk to me and he would help me to understand, you know, that it wasn't going to be for a long time." In this instance, her counsellor's support was very valuable to her and made a big difference in her ability to cope with the situation. It likely helped her feel confident enough to ask for her children back when her ex-husband attempted to adopt them.

Having someone, whether it was a family member, friend, support group, or counsellor, available to provide support was important and seemed to speed the adjustment process. After all, as one of my co-researchers stated, "being heard and acknowledged are really what all human beings desire." Most of my co-researchers said they felt that the support they received helped them adapt to their new situation of living separately from their

children. Reviewing my co-researchers story suggests that the support they received also helped also them develop resistance strategies that enabled them to cope more adaptively to living apart from their children.

Developing Alternate Interpretations

When interviewing my co-researchers I had asked them "what is a family and who are mothers?" I did not realise until I began to analyse their responses that they had actually told me about how they developed one resistance strategy to cope with their marginalisation – an alternate understanding of motherhood. Joan chose to answer my question sequentially, beginning when she first separated from her children and moving forward to the present. This response pattern provided some unique insights. It showed the pattern of emotional changes she went through as she journeyed from the initial separation to acceptance of her new role. I will attempt capture these insights for you by organising my co-researchers' reported experiences sequentially, as modelled by Joan.

In the quotation at the beginning of this chapter Joan said she had lost her role, but later came to understand that being a mother is a bond with her children that defines who she is. Earlier in our discussion, Joan provided these insights about who she believed a mother was when she first began to live apart from her children.

> To be a mother for me meant to be someone who never got angry, someone who was always perfect, someone who was always there for their children. Basically a saint. Obviously someone who never had sex because that would not fit the image of a mother. More like a Virgin Mary sort of . . . and now about what it means to me being a mother. To be a mother has changed over the years. When I was with my children I wanted to be the best I could be and so on and very perfect. But I ended up making kind of a lot of mistakes, you know. As a point of reference maybe just what society wanted moms to be you know. I wanted to be like that fit into that image.

Laura's beliefs about who a mother is echoed Joan's initial understanding. About being a mother Laura said, "When I am with them I do everything I can for them. I stay home with them, I do things with them, and I take care of them, and I love them." Each of my co-researchers appeared to have initially accepted our society's definition and standards for mothers as identified by researchers such as Jill Matthews in Good and Mad Women and Marlee Kline in "Complicating the Ideology of Motherhood: Child Welfare Law and First Nation Women."[15]

Each of my co-researchers said that they experienced feelings of loss of role, anger, and grief when they first began to live apart from their children. Eventually, however, they began to evolve a new understanding of motherhood. As Joan said, "but then I realise that to be a mother is more than a role, it's really part of who I am." Laura volunteered that:

> For me it's to give the kids a sense of knowing where they belong. Knowing that it doesn't matter, they can talk to me about anything. And they do at this point . . . I don't know if it's unconditional [love] or conditional. There are conditions in so far as you have to behave yourself and this and that. But it doesn't matter what you do, I am always going to be your mom and I'm always going to love you.

She also said that after awhile she came to recognise that being a mother is "helping the child [to] discover where they belong" and to recognise that she will always be available for them. Bernice said that as her understanding of motherhood evolved she began to realise that:

> Being a mother means a great deal of change in yourself if you were to think about how it affects you. It also means being available. It means not being very popular sometimes. It's both a very rewarding and very restrictive experience. It is not what people believe is going to be a self-satisfying [experience], because it doesn't necessarily have to be a satisfying role. But if you raise children that are capable that end up being good citizens, well then you'll know you've had this little part in history that was pretty miserable sometimes. But it has to be done. It is just a necessary job. . . . And as people

[15] Jill Matthews, Ibid. and Marlee Kline, "Complicating the Ideology of Motherhood: Child Welfare Law and First Nation Women," *Queens Law Journal*, 2 (1993), 311.

> you will always be looking at that other side because we [are] always wanting something else. You know something to balance our lives off with. And you can't pursue those things always being a mother. So, it is something that you look forward to and you look forward to finishing as well.

Bernice's comments demonstrate an awareness of the tasks mothers undertake with the birth or adoption of a child. I felt that she displayed a great deal of courage when she acknowledged that being a mother is not always satisfying, is sometimes restrictive, and that at times one's own needs are set aside to meet another person's.

Part of my co-researchers' changing perceptions of themselves included accepting that mothering is an occupation that changes as one's child(ren) mature, whether one lives with them or apart from them. It is, as several of the mothers commented, an ongoing job that is not complete until one's child has become independent. Joan said:

> that [the definition of motherhood] changes as my children are getting older. I feel that definition again is being revised, because they are growing up. And then gradually they lead their own life. And I feel therefore that, you know, they are my children but in a way though I haven't been actively involved in their upbringing in the last nine years. I feel that in a way I am catching up with the mothers who reach the age when their children leave home and they start to pull away because their children are growing up. So in a way now psychologically that is what I am doing. Because of what I have done, I have severed the bond quite a long time ago. But I feel that now maybe something is coming together.

For Joan, like most of my other co-researchers, things did come together with time. They appeared to move forward, finish their grieving, and identify new ways to nurture their children.

My co-researchers' route to acceptance followed many of the steps in the grief process.[16] This is understandable because when they began living apart from their child(ren) they lost their daily contact with their children and their role as their child(ren)'s direct care-

[16] Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Ibid.

provider. Gradually, my co-researchers came to accept the limitations of mothering their children from a distance. In doing, so they used their agency to let go of some of their self-blame and their beliefs that mothers physically care for their children and instead looked for ways they could maintain their relationship with their children while living apart from them.

Identifying a Space to Nurture Their Children

In maintaining their relationships with their children, it was necessary for my co-researchers to construct new patterns of relating with their children as well as new definitions of who they were as mothers. Sometimes their resistance strategies included developing an awareness, for example, that being able to visit distant communities two or three times a year is possible for people who have transportation and access to at least some discretionary income but unavailable for those who do not. For Joan, the need to visit her children appeared to be the impetus she needed to become financial stable. In response to my question, "do you get to visit your children very often?" she stated:

> Now I'm starting again, since my financial situation has improved I can visit them a little bit more. But when they moved, then visiting time was usually from one summer to the other . . . [I wasn't able to keep in touch with them] except over the phone, always remembering birthdays and all the stat holidays. And you know as I said in the summer time, so it has been pretty hard. And you know, the last couple of years or so which I was not financially able to go there, but I really needed and wanted to see them. But I was just not able to afford it financially. Which was one of the reasons I was really determined to get back on my feet a bit more financially, and I have achieved that. I last visited them the beginning of November.

Most of the mothers used creativity to develop their own pattern of nurturing their children and maintaining their relationship with them. Sandra, whose children were teenagers and young adults said about her mothering, "like I have an influence on my kids. Most of them run and do things and their dad doesn't do any of these things. And his partner certainly doesn't. But we'll run." Maintaining their relationship with their children, letting them

know they were loved and cared for, and influencing their development were the focus of my co-researchers' involvement with their children.

The two mothers who said that their children's behaviour was the precipitating cause of their living away from them still attempted to maintain a relationship with their children. Bernice, whose child currently resides at a youth correction centre, said she was searching for a way to keep in touch when her child appeared not to want to make the effort. Here is part of our conversation:

> (S)he is never totally abandoned. And I have sort of made up my mind; it was my sort of commitment to the cause that I would not leave Prince George, as long as (s)he was living here . . . I haven't gone up, 'cause (s)he hasn't [called]. And I have been thinking about sending [my child] a card saying 'dear so and so thinking of you, I am praying about you.' And I am thinking that I should go the extra mile and do that . . . and I understand that . . . I know you are going through a rough time. It is fine if you don't phone. Phone when you want.

Telephone calls and visits to the Youth Correction Centre are restricted and the child's behaviour may cause curtailment of those that are available. These constraints and the child's not choosing to invite a parent to visit may over-ride a parent's desire to see their child while they reside at the centre. Zaza, the other mother whose child's behaviour was at the heart of their separation, commented:

> Inside I love [my child] because (s)he's mine: [my child] came from me. But no[t] behaviour wise and as a person I don't love [my child]. And now I just feel a lot of loss. And you feel very sorry for the child . . . I'm just sorry that [my child] has made these choices. Because it's, what's going to happen to [my child] as an adult?

Zaza currently is keeping in touch with her child only through phone conversations. Although she is not actively attempting to be involved in her child's life at the moment, she expressed disappointment at the care her child was receiving and is concerned for her child's future.

Custody arrangements are for children. Young adults, on the other hand, have the opportunity to choose with whom and where they live. It appears that one of Sandra's resistance strategies was to maintain her relationship with her children while waiting for them to become independent. When one of her children became a young adult (s)he choose to come and live with her. In describing her child coming to stay with her, Sandra said, "[my child] lived with us from September to December and [my child] is coming back, probably next week. Just in the last year [my child lived with us]. Since (s)he graduated kind of thing [my child] came up here for work. So I mean, I love it. I really like having [my child] here." Anne took a similar route. She kept in touch with her child as (s)he grew up and when the child was ready, they rebuilt their relationship. Now she appears to be acting as a mentor for her child and says they have a relationship based on mutual friendship.

All of the mothers I interviewed initially struggled to find a method to meet their children's needs for mothering and nurturing despite the fact that they lived apart from them. To identify spaces where they could nurture their children, they redefined their understanding of who a mother is and found creative solutions to parent their children while living apart from them. My co-researchers demonstrated vision and agency in finding these spaces while being bombarded with messages from the media that good mothers care for their children themselves and that those mothers who do not do so are bad. My co-researchers' commitment to nurturing their children reflects a tacit understanding of who a mother is when she is no longer responsible for the daily caregiving – she is a person who nurtures children by helping them develop boundaries, self-esteem, and an understanding of themselves as independent valuable beings. All of my co-researchers appear to have used the

resistance strategy of redefining who they were as mothers and arrived at the same conclusion independent of each other and without outside influence.

Challenging How Fathers are Judged

A final resistance strategy my co-researchers used to cope with their marginalisation and subsequent oppression was to modify how they assessed their ex-spouses' parenting abilities. To do so, they challenged the accepted beliefs about what a father's role is as primary caregiver for his child(ren).

Sandra's made a general comment about the difference between mothers and fathers when a father has custody. She said, "It's really warped because that doesn't happen the other way around. Men who have custody tend to be the new heroes in our society. They are doing your job and they make sure you know you abandoned [your children]." Sandra further volunteered that society, "just expects fathers to carry on, and not to grieve. They have to just pretend its okay, not even care if they see [their children]." This expectation that fathers should not grieve might be denying them an opportunity to get in touch with their pain and perhaps develop empathy for other individuals, such as their own children or their estranged partners.

Laura appeared to use a form of comparative analysis to challenge the judge's and community's views of her ex-spouse's parenting abilities and began to judge her ex-spouse's behaviour as a father on the same basis as she was judged when she was their primary care-giver. She said, that the judge in their custody case stated that her ex-spouse was, "a perfect father because he works and he's hired a nanny, and he's willing to take responsibility for his children." Laura said that though her ex-spouse is "considered a good parent even if a nanny provides the physical care for the children" she doesn't think so. Her stated objections to her

ex-spouse being considered a good father included -- not making time for the children, not taking them shopping with him, not accompanying them on their first day to kindergarten -- all things that a mother would be expected to do. She also said he does not help the children maintain their relationship with her by telephoning at the agreed times and makes negative comments about her to the children. She stated that a mother who had custody would be sanctioned if she exhibited these last two behaviours.

Sandra appears to challenge her belief that her ex-spouse is a perfect father by remembering that when she and her ex-husband lived in the same community he would bring her the acting out child to deal with when he had trouble with him/her. She also says he blames her rather than taking responsibility for the situation if he is unhappy about something because he is doing her job of caring for the children.

Joan also challenged the belief that her ex-spouse was a good parent. When I met her around Easter, she said she was upset with her ex-husband after telephoning to wish her children a Happy Easter. She stated that her children had said, "Dad didn't get us any chocolate. He got some for himself but he isn't sharing." She said that she thought that if she had done the same thing everyone would have said she was selfish. Joan's recognition at Easter that her ex-spouse was acting selfishly with the children seems to have initiated an increased awareness about her children's needs. She reports that she is now advocating more effectively on their behalf to help them meet their needs.

Each of my co-researchers who have children living with their ex-spouse questioned his ability to parent effectively. In doing so they were challenging the belief, as stated by Laura, that "a father is a good as long as he doesn't beat his kids and provides for them financially." Instead of this belief their comments suggest that they thought fathers who

were primary guardians of their children should be expected to provide the same standard of care as mothers who were primary guardians of their children.

In this section, I identified three of the areas where my co-researchers resisted society's belief that they were bad mothers. My analysis suggests that their resistance enabled them to recognise that their ex-spouses were also imperfect parents and that the currently held definition of a mother is flawed. I also showed that four of my co-researchers found another site of resistance when they identified a space to could continue nurturing their children.

Critical Insights

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, researchers have an opportunity through creative analysis to suggest alternate interpretations of events. These new interpretations may help identify alternate sites of resistance for the groups one is studying and that empower them to more effectively resist their impression. In this section I am going to use my position as the principal investigator to examine mothers' roles as primary caregivers, mothers' roles as non-custodial parents, fathers as primary caregivers, and mothers' reduced agency when they live apart from their children. I will also suggest an alternate way to explain the experiences of mothers who live apart from their children.

Mothers' Roles As Primary Caregivers

My research suggests two reasons why the roles my six co-researchers were expected to fulfill as mothers and adults created problems for them. First, none of my co-researchers met the expectations of a 'good mother' such as always being able to meet their children's needs and never having any personal issues to prevent them from doing so. As I have shown

previously, their inability to fulfill their assigned roles resulted in internalised guilt, social stigmatisation, and in some cases, the direct loss of their children's custody (e.g. Bernice, Laura, and Sandra). This appears to have happened because current role expectations for mothers deny that they have needs of their own, blame them for inappropriate parenting if their children have disorders or do not respond as the experts say they should, and provide no alternative model of motherhood other than that of a full-time mother with custody. These expectations are impossible for most mothers to meet.

Second, my research suggests that, in several instances, the roles assigned to my co-researchers as mothers and as adult members of society were not compatible. The incongruency between the two roles is most apparent when one examines how mothers are judged if they require child-care at 'unusual times' (e.g. at night or on weekends), require respite care for young children or a child with behaviour problems, require counselling or another form of support for their own needs, or are unable to both care for their children and be financially independent. Laura is an example of what happens when a mother is expected to fulfill roles that are mutually exclusive. Before going back to school, she was deemed an unfit mother because she had inadequate finances to care for her children. So she arranged for her ex-spouse to temporarily care for their children while she undertook training for a better job. When she had completed her training, her ex-spouse took her to court to gain full custody. The judge deemed her a bad parent for going back to school while her ex-spouse cared for their children. Subsequently, he awarded her ex-spouse full custody.

Bernice and Zaza are two more examples of mothers who could not simultaneously meet all their children's needs and their own needs. In Chapter 3, I showed that these mothers asked for help so that they could successfully parent children who were later

diagnosed with behavioural disorders. When none was forthcoming, they made the difficult decision to have these particular children live elsewhere so that their behaviour did not harm their siblings. My own story is different. By supporting me to parent my children, my counsellor enabled me to meet the challenges their disorders caused. My family's relative success at maintaining our family unit with adequate support compared to my co-researchers' inability to do so without this support suggests an area for further research to identify methods that might support mothers to simultaneously meet their children's needs and their own needs.

Mothers' Roles as Non-custodial Parent

My co-researchers concluded that nurturing is the essential feature women provide for the next generation. In this section I will use crystallisation to look at the role of mother from a different perspective to see if I can find evidence to support their interpretation. To do so, I will look at my co-researchers' understanding of what is a mother's role, what role they lost as mothers when they began living apart from their children, and what is a father's role. In my analysis I will identify the work of raising their children that is assumed by others when mothers live apart from their children and compare this to what jobs mothers who live with their children are expected to fulfill. This should identify any functions available that a mother that lives apart from her children might assume. I will then compare these activities to those my co-researchers identified so that they could continue to nurture their children.

To begin my analysis, I will look at what society understands a mother's role to be. A good mother as described by Jill Matthews and Marlee Kline, bears healthy children, keeps

them healthy and well behaved, and maintains her fitness and ability to mother at all times.[17] A quick review of my co-researchers' experiences confirms that in North Central British Columbia these expectations are also accepted as the norm. First, let us consider that the two mothers whose children had behavioural problems had their concerns ignored by their physicians when their children were toddlers. Both mothers recalled that they were judged negatively for their inability to mother these children. This negative judgement's tacit assumption is that somehow mothers are able to prevent abnormal development in their children. Second, there is the assumption that mothers will be available to parent at all times. Several of my co-researchers mentioned the impossibility of meeting this requirement of motherhood. Three mothers said that having low self-esteem because of abuse, either as a child or as an adult, and needing to deal with the effects of the abuse was one of the preconditions that caused them to be temporarily unfit to care for her children. Leaving children with a nanny or sitter while they went out to work was also viewed negatively by some members of society. Here are Laura's comments about this situation:

> . . . . for the woman you go out and get a job and you are only home Saturday and Sunday with the kids and the occasional evening. (And you hear the comments) 'oh she's a horrible mother. She can't even take care of her kids. She doesn't take care of her kids. She is getting child support; I don't understand why she's got to go to work.'

From Laura's comments it is clear that some members of our community believe that a mother should care for her child(ren) at all times.

In summary then, adding all of the pieces of what a mother's job is, the expectation is that a mother: cares for her children twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is always available and pleasant, has infinite wisdom about how to negate the effects of genetic

[17] Jill Matthews, Ibid.; Marlee Kline, Ibid., 311.

abnormalities and outside influences, loves and nurtures her child(ren) helping them to discover who they are as individuals, and never has any personal issues that prevent her from doing her job as a mother.

Before proceeding further in my analysis, there are two parts of a mother's role that I will identify separately. These two parts are artefacts[18] of the roles mothers are assigned by our culture. Because some parenting tasks are socially constructed, identifying them will allow me to develop a greater understanding of how culture influences the assignment of parenting roles specific to each gender. The first is the portion of a mother's tasks that a father assumes when he provided primary care for his children. The second is those portions of a mother's role she looses when she is not responsible for the daily care of her children. Table 1 summarises my literature review on this subject and my co-researchers' data.

[18] In cell biology 'artefacts' are the changes in the specimen created by the slide preparation. I find it useful to look at socialisation as an artefact because it is part of civilisation rather than part of nature and using this perspective makes it easier to identify whether something is part of the natural or social worlds. Shulamit Reinharz, "Feminist Content Analysis," in *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 146, discusses cultural artefacts.

Table 1: Primary Caregiver Jobs

JOBS ASSIGNED TO A MOTHER AS PRIMARY CAREGIVER	WHAT MOTHERS DO AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS	WHAT FATHERS DO AS PRIMARY CAREGIVER	JOBS ALTERNATE CARE-PROVIDER DOES WHEN A FATHER IS PRIMARY CAREGIVER	FUNCTIONS LEFT FOR A MOTHER WHO IS NOT A PRIMARY CAREGIVER
Cares for children 24 hours each day (feeds, clothes, watches child, school, medical attention, special events and crisis)	Attempts to	No	Not usually	No
Makes decisions on child's behalf	Yes	Yes	Yes, with permission	No
Always available and pleasant	Would like to be	No	No	No
Knows what is happening for the child	Tries	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Unable
Never has any personal issues to prevent above	No	No	No	No
Negates genetic and outside influences	Tries	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Tries
Loves and nurtures children (talks with children)	Yes	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Tries
Helps child discover who (s)he is (helps child set boundaries and develop moral behaviour).	Yes	Not mentioned	Mothers said they did not	Tries

When one examines what is left of a mother's role when she lives apart from her child(ren) the last three rows are essentially the only part of motherhood that is still available. The ability to make decisions on her child's behalf, be with her child during special events, crisis, and on a daily basis, or care for her child's daily needs, as indicated in the first four rows, are all gone. For the most part, my co-researchers believed that their child's new care-providers had not assumed the role of helping their children discover themselves as worthwhile human beings. These mothers identified this as a place where they could continue to influence their child through nurturing. In this respect my systematic analysis agrees with my co-researchers' findings.

Fathers as Primary Caregivers

My co-researchers' comments about their ex-spouses' behaviour with their children and their insights about these behaviours left me wondering what was happening. Reading between the lines of Joan's description of her ex-spouse and the Easter candy and the other comments about how their children's fathers' parent suggests that some of these particular fathers do not consider their child(ren)'s perspective when making decisions that impact on their children. Their priority appears to be themselves; their children's needs take second place to their own. Growing up in this atmosphere, a child's self-esteem may suffer and they may learn that their desires are not important. Sandra, who did not identify her ex-spouse as abusive, mentioned that her children "are guilt ridden. Even Christmas day, we went down there, but they weren't allowed to leave the house. They couldn't see us if they wanted to. And the kids wouldn't push it either. They don't want to rock the boat. They don't want to upset their dad." In most homes, teenagers feel safe enough to push the boundaries as they struggle for independence; in fact, developmental psychology includes this as a normal part

of development.[19] I wonder if living with fathers such as these teaches children that in families hierarchical patriarchy is the family norm – that the most powerful individual's needs and desires are met regardless of the cost to others. Further, if this is what they learn, what type of relationships will they have in the future?

Mothers' Reduced Agency

My co-researchers are women of courage, most of whom sought and found a space within which they continued to mother their children. It took agency and vision together with courage for them to identify and create this nurturing space. They exercised this agency within the constraints of a culture that gives mothers little autonomy to determine their role as mothers and excludes them from any positions of expertise. My data suggest that for many of the mothers it was impossible to fulfill their role as it was assigned. For example, Bernice who has a BA in a discipline related to child development and would be considered an expert if employed in her field, is not being heard or given authority to determine what her child needs. The other mothers' transcripts reveal that they too are excluded from position of authority that would enable them to define what their child needs or how those needs should be met.

Role assignment that modifies and over-determines the amount of agency or power a person is able to exercise can be discrimination. As Gordon Allport states "over-categorization is perhaps the commonest trick of the human mind. Given a thimbleful of

[19] Henry Cloud & John Townsend, "How Boundaries are Developed," in *Boundaries: When to Say Yes When to Say No To Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 65, and Donald Irwin & Janet Simons, "Psychosocial Development in Adolescence," in *Lifespan Developmental Psychology* (Madison: WCB Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1994), 290.

facts we rush to make generalisations as large as a tub."[20] Moreover, these generalisations help us keep track of the vast amounts of material we need to consider in our interactions with each other. They become prejudice and discrimination, however, when they prevent us from treating other people as equally human as ourselves. Viewing members of a particular gender as inferior can marginalise or silence them. bell hooks states that in the black community "when this sexist silencing occurs, it usually happens with the tacit complicity of audiences who have over time learned to think always of race within blackness as a male thing and to assume that the real political leaders emerging from such public debates will always and only be male."[21] My research suggests that in our communities the roles assigned to women are tacitly accepted without examining how they affect us. Looking at individual instances when women are unable to be "good enough mothers" hides the discriminatory beliefs that guide our society's expectations of mothers.[22] If we choose to look at the roles mothers are assigned for a moment from a different perspective, we may develop a new awareness of how they affect some women.

Sexism can result in discrimination, an acknowledged form of oppression that at times can become an abusive form of control. My co-researchers experienced discrimination when their behaviours were judged differently than were the behaviours of their husbands, other males, and 'conforming' mothers. For example some of my respondents said they were judged bad mothers when their relationships failed but their husbands were not judged as bad fathers. Two mothers said they were labelled 'not good enough' when they worked and left their children with sitters, whereas the father who has a nanny to raise the children is deemed

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[20] Gordon W. Allport, "What is the Problem?" in *The Nature of Prejudice,* 25th ed. (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), 8.

[21] bell hooks, "Introduction: Race Talk," in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 2.

a good parent. Some of the mothers risk negative judgement if they openly acknowledge that they gave in to a spouse's pressure to permit their children to live with him. Instead they say they choose to leave their child(ren) behind. In the same situation, a father would likely receive empathy for the 'nagging' he endured. The role expectations for parents appear to be gender-specific and do not make allowances for situation specific events (i.e. abusive partners or lack of money). For example, fathers are not labelled bad if they have extramarital affairs, do not maintain the relationship with their child's mother, do not meet their spouse's sexual needs, or take time away from their children to deal with their own issues or go to work. In most cases, women are labelled bad if they engage in these behaviours and also when their husband does, because they have not met his needs. These forms of discrimination are based on gender-specific behavioural expectations that reduce a mother's ability to make the best choice for her children and herself.

One more area of sexism is the incompatibility of the roles women are assigned as adult members of society and as mothers. Since I already discussed this earlier on page 121, I will just add to that discussion. Women in our culture are socialised to be passive and submit to their husbands and those in authority,[23] as adults we are also expected to exercise agency and choice in our decisions. For some of the women in my study, these requirements were in binary opposition. Most of the mothers in my study stated that it was their choice to live separately from her children. Before the separation, however, each of them was their child(ren)'s primary care provider and, as I will document, most did not actually make the decision to live apart from their children free of constraint. In attempting to cope with two incongruent requirements, some of my co-researchers appeared to use the strategy of

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[22] Ibid, 108.
[23] Jill Matthews, "Management of the Gender Order" 99-100; "Work" 148-172, Ibid.

doublethink/doublespeak and deny their actual experiences so they could conform to their internalised expectations of themselves as adults. For example Laura stated that she arranged for her ex-spouse to care for their children while she went to school and at another point in time recounted a telephone conversation that would suggest a different interpretation of the event. The need for doublethink/doublespeak, as I mentioned previously, suggests the presence of some form of abuse or excessive control. Laura mentioned that her ex-spouse was still abusive in his attempts to control her.

Throughout Chapters 3 and 4, I have mentioned instances where my participants were unable to make autonomous decisions based on their own needs and those of their children. Literature related to women's abuse issues generally acknowledges that abuse results in a reduction of self-esteem, self-worth, ability to make autonomous decisions, and identification with the other person's needs at the expense of their own.[24] The effects of abuse may make a mother temporarily unable to advocate on her own behalf or parent to the best of her ability. These effects are usually not considered during custody hearings. Instead, a mother's ability to function is judged as static rather than dynamic with respect to her social environment. Further, her behaviour as a response to her abuse is often judged as sufficient justification for the abuse.[25] This denial of the effects of abuse further erodes a mother's agency and is gender specific.

The pre-conditions that led to most of my co-researchers living apart from their children at first appear different – for example, arranging for MC&F to care for a child

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[24] Judith Lewis Herman, Ibid., is one author who examines the effects of abuse through the exercise of power and control.

[25] See Phyllis Chesler, "The Price of Battle: Mothers Encounter the Psychological Law: in *Mothers On Trail: The Battle for Children and Custody* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), 215-220; Judith Lewis Herman, "A New Diagnosis" Ibid., 116-122, for a discussion of the effect of abuse.

versus direct intimidation by one's ex-partner. However, an examination of the various events that led to the separation from their children reveals a common theme: my participants were experiencing various forms of emotional and mental control. Their interpretations of what happened were restricted, however, to the immediate event rather than the overall relationship. This thinking pattern is called "narrowing of range" and happens to victims of chronic abuse and trauma.[26] In telling their stories about how they came to live apart from their child(ren), my co-researchers appeared at times to use denial and interpreted events from the other person's perspective. This pattern is similar to that used by trauma victims and is called traumatic bonding.[27] The stories I have presented reveal many examples of narrowing of range, denial, and interpretations of events so they fit another person's perspective. Each of these is an indication that abuse is likely occurring.

Each of my co-researchers' separation from her children appeared to be related to excessive power and control; however, some relationship break-ups and children living apart from their mothers are not influenced by abuse. This points to a dilemma in deciding custody issues. If an ex-partner is used to exercising power and control over their spouse, is he likely to exercise the same form of abusive control over a child in his care? Further, if abuse is involved and the child is asked to choose which parent they wish to live with, they may chose to live with the stronger parent, because they do not believe the parent who is being abused is capable of caring for them.[28] There is a real need when making decision

[26] Judith Lewis Herman, "Captivity," Ibid, 90.
[27] Ibid, "Child Abuse," 92 for a discussion of the effects of bonding with one's abuser such as the disruption to one's identity, accepting the other person's interpretations of events, and denial.
[28] Ibid., 100.

about custody issues to consider all aspects of the situation, including what the relationship was like between the parents and whether abuse was involved.

My research supports two things that give credence to an alternate viewpoint as being accurate. First, my research suggests that the roles mothers are assigned restrict their agency at times to the point where they can no longer meet their own needs. Second, my research suggests that at times mothers without their children are using doublespeak/double think, denial, and other coping strategies that are typically used by victims of abuse in situations that are not related to partner abuse. My interpretation of what is happening for these mothers suggests that the control being exercised by society has become excessive and that it is similar to the psychological control exercised by abusers.[29]

In Chapter 5, "Summary & Discussions" I will briefly review my findings and discuss how they fit into our culture's understanding of motherhood and agency. In addition I will list all of the topics for further research to which that my thesis drew attention.

[29] Ibid., "Captivity," 76-95.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF MY FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

I began my thesis with a personal reflection concerning our society's lack of resources for one potentially loving mother to be an active participant in her child's life. Although that mother was mentally challenged, the six mothers I interviewed were not. However, like her, they experienced problems as they attempted to remain part of their children's lives while living apart from them. Further, they had little power to make autonomous decisions about their relationships with their children.

The pre-conditions that resulted in their living apart from their children in most cases revealed a history of power and control by others, rather than free choice on their part. Two of the three mothers whose children's behaviour was the pre-condition for the separation made the choice to have this child live apart from them to ensure the safety of their other children. One other mother whose children chose to live apart her from said that she was having difficulties parenting. It appears that finances might have been a contributing factor in all three of these instances. Two mothers experienced emotional and financial control by their partners. One also suffered sexual abuse. The four mothers whose ex-spouses cared for their children continued to experience problems with them exhibiting excessive power and control. All of the mothers reported that they were often the recipients of negative verbal judgements from a variety of people.

In this, my final chapter, I bring together the themes I found and discuss their meaning in relation to some of the current literature about motherhood. Second, I reflect on the implications for social and public policy of my research and its the limitations. Third, I

review the areas for further research that I became aware of during the course of my research. Finally, I present my conclusions.

Throughout my thesis, I have examined my research question, how do mothers who live apart from their children experience motherhood, from various points of view. Using Grounded Methodology and Feminist Standpoint Theory I have asked such questions as how did it come about that these mothers live separately from their children, how do they feel about themselves as mothers, what are their experiences as mothers who do not meet our accepted cultural norms, how do they explain living separate from their children to themselves and others, and if or how do these mothers continue to parent their children? From the beginning of my thesis I have acknowledged my place as a researcher in the process, and will continue to do so as I bring my thesis to a close.

General Themes

Each of the different questions I asked contributed to my overall understanding of how the six women that I interviewed experience motherhood. The one overall theme that developed was that these particular mothers were experiencing marginalisation and oppression. As I discussed in my literature review, one's perspective is affected by one's current viewpoint. In my research, when I re-examined my data by asking a different question, I found different themes. Each of these perspectives contributes to a more holistic understanding of the lives of mothers who live apart from their children than does a single perspective. Looking at my co-researchers' lives from alternate perspectives revealed many areas in which they experienced oppression in relation to their interactions with others (e.g. careproviders, general population), intimates (e.g. family of origin members, spouses, and children), and themselves, their responses, and the agency they were able to exercise.

Interactions

The interactions my co-researchers experienced with intimates, others and themselves could be roughly divided into two categories, supportive or judgmental. Each of these social responses related to the beliefs and expectations of the individual making them. My research shows many instances of negative social interactions, to which my co-researchers at times reacted angrily. It also shows that not all people view mothers who live apart from their children negatively, and that in fact some caregivers, intimates, and friends provided positive support for my co-researchers. Further, my research shows that when mothers who live apart from their children are able to accept themselves, they use the energy from their anger to challenge and change their own and other people's negative opinions and reactions.

Responses to Oppression

Gender subordination in our patriarchal society is one of several manifestations of oppression. Women with post-secondary education who earn poverty-level wages and mothers who are expected to subordinate their needs to those of their children are among the oppressed. By contrast men, who are dominant in our western society, are likely to earn higher wages, and fathers are rarely expected to subordinate their own needs to those of their children. Abuse, a form of violence, is another widespread manifestation of unequal power relations in patriarchal societies. Because men control social institutions as well as women's bodies, they maintain their power by acts of violence which, in turn, support the continued existence of patriarchy.[1]

[1] See "Violence" Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 292.

Maintaining power by abuse was apparent in some of my co-researchers' relationships during their childhood, adulthood, with their children's fathers, with the Ministry of Children and Families, and with the general community. This was because our society's patriarchial structure gives mothers and children less status and power than it does to other members of society. Low power permits others to dictate what options and resources are available. Examples are Laura's experiencing marital rape and verbal "put-downs" and Bernice's inability to access appropriate help with her child. In the later instance the Ministry of Children and Families and the Youth Correction Service eventually became responsible for the child's care, at a cost that was likely higher than if they had supported Bernice by financing the help she had located. While withholding funding for 'optional' health care costs may not seem abusive, the results for a mother trying to cope alone because she is denied access to available needed resources can result in an intolerable living situation. This could be deemed 'abuse by the system.' It might also be considered abusive when public institutions deny access to needed resources if we maintained a more holistic view of our community.[2]

Marginalisation is characterised by oppression that usually includes discrimination. My research indicates that my co-researchers experienced both oppression and discrimination because of marginalisation. For example, Bernice was silenced, even though she has a degree related to child management, and her voice was not considered when it came to making decision regarding her child. Discrimination also occurred in the judicial

[2] In the past slavery was also not considered an abuse of human rights. History has proven otherwise and today to keep anyone as slaves is considered abusive and a violation of human rights. Restricting access to resources to help parents meet their children needs, as parents of disabled children argue, keeps their children in bondage to their disability and effectively makes them slaves to it. See "Special needs, special costs . . . ," *The Prince George Citizen* Thursday, June 17, 1999.

systems when custody was awarded to ex-spouses and my co-researchers were considered 'bad mothers' without taking a holistic view of the circumstances.

Most of my co-researchers seemed at times to exhibit narrowing of range and double speak, two effects of abuse and chronic oppression. These responses appeared to prevent some of them from seeing what was actual happening so that they could resist their oppression. For example, prior to their separation from their children all of my co-researchers provided full-time care for their children, yet, when describing their separation from their children they often said that it had been their decision. They seemingly disregarded that previously they had chosen to care for their children and that the decision to live apart from their children was not freely made.

Agency

Agency is the final theme that emerged in relation to my co-researchers' marginalisation. It varied across situations and thus was a useful tool for determining what effect socialisation exerts in a particular situation. My research indicated that our social system provided little opportunity for my co-researchers to exercise free choice in many cases. For example, none of them had the power to determine what their child needed or how to meet those needs, nor did they have any real power to influence the custody arrangements of their children. The latter were often decided and enforced by the courts, Ministry of Children and Families or controlling ex-partners.

The themes I identified in my research demonstrate the importance of looking at things from more than one point of view and not simply believing what one is told. If I had unquestioningly believed what I was told, I would have written a story about six mothers who had made the decision to live apart from their children and were relieved that they no

longer had primary care for their children. Digging deeper, however, revealed that these mothers suffered from guilt, as well as the pain from living apart from their children. It also showed the societal factors which affected their decisions to live apart from their children such as sexist custodial court decisions, inadequate financial resources, counselling, and respite care. Further it revealed many symptoms of marginalisation that they experienced such as invisibility, isolation, internalised guilt, negative social judgement, silencing, and reduced agency.

Implication for Government Policy Changes

My research points to five areas that concern me about government policy and our social structure and suggests that reform might be appropriate in these areas. My participants also volunteered areas where they wanted to see social transformation. In many instances, I was able to confirm my research findings' validity by referring to other research and academic literature. First, my research findings are consistent with Phyllis Chesler's research suggesting that mothers are treated unfairly in the justice system.[3] Thus, it complements her work by demonstrating that mothers who live apart from their children are marginalised and points to the need for policy change in the Canadian judicial system as well as the American one.

Second, my research indicates that social reform is needed to ensure that women are able to fill the roles they are assigned as adults and mothers with sufficient personal energy remaining so that they do not become disheartened. This is consistent with the

[3] Phyllis Chesler, "The Price of Battle: Mothers Encounter the Psychological Law," *Mothers On Trial: The Battle for Children and Custody* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), 215.

findings of others feminists such as Jill Matthews, Marlee Kline, and Katherine Arnup.[4] Each of the six mothers that I interviewed was, at times, unable to meet both her own needs and her children's needs. When this occurred, the mothers made choices constrained by the situation and that may not have been in both their children's and their own best interests. Examples are Bernice's and Zaza's decisions to have the Ministry of Children and Families care for their children when they could no longer tolerate the inappropriate behaviour that was a danger to their other children. After Bernice's child went into foster care, the child became more involved in "criminal" activities and eventually entered the Youth Correction Centre. With additional resources, Bernice might have been able to meet her child's needs and the child may have experienced a more positive outcome, one that her mother could feel good about instead of angry and hurt. Her experience and those of the other mothers I reviewed, including my own, indicate that children's needs might be better served by supporting mothers in their endeavours to meet their children's needs. To facilitate this it might be appropriate to direct additional finances to the social support networks whose mandate it is to assist parents and children. In addition, I would like to see policy changes so that government care providers (social workers) can support parents because they need help without judging their parenting style. Several women who participated in my study were unwilling to accept assistance because it meant they had to accept a label of 'inadequate mother.'

A third area in which social reform may be required pertains to returning to mothers the right to make decisions on their children's behalf. My research indicates that

[4] Phyllis Chesler, *Mothers On Trial* Ibid., Marlee Kline, "Complicating the Ideology of Motherhood: Child Welfare Law and First Nation Women" *Queens Law Journal*, 2 (1993); Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

many of the mothers were not heard nor did they have the right to make decisions on their children's behalf. My literature review showed that many of the "experts" views of how children should be raised have been disproven. The following quotation from Paula Nicolson supports my findings:

> The role of 'mother' has not evolved in a 'natural' way, outside culture and free from ideology. It has been socially constructed within patriarchy through a complex set of power relations which ensure that women become mothers, and practice motherhood, in narrowly-defined ways. This is achieved in part through the mechanism of 'science', which attends to and bolsters existing power relations. Contemporary motherhood is the product of (at least) nineteenth- and twentieth-century medical/biological and psychological/social [western] science .
>
> Social prescriptions for contemporary motherhood are constantly offered, reinforce and embellished by 'experts' with recourse to 'science,' and their versions of what constitutes good mothering practice is the socially received 'wisdom'. Certain kinds of claims to knowledge are given priority over others, and it is those which serve the needs of the socially powerful (that is, in this case, men) (Foucault, 1973; and Philip, 1985), that pass into popular discourse and come to represent our everyday understanding of what we all take for granted as 'truth' or 'facts' (see Antaki, 1988).[5]

My analysis of mother's roles suggest that they are narrowly defined and do not permit mothers with or without their children to define how they parent their children. Perhaps it is time for research into this area and social reform including policy changes that returns more authority to mothers.

A fourth area in which reform may be necessary is the judicial system. Policy about child custody declares that,

> **Best interests of child are paramount**
>
> (1) When making, varying or rescinding an order under this Part, a court must give paramount consideration to the best interest of the child and, in assessing those interests, must consider the following factors and give emphasis to each factor according to the child's needs and circumstances:
>
> (a) the health and emotional well being of the child including any special needs for care and treatment;

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[5] Paula Nicolson, "Motherhood and Women's lives," in Diane Richardson & Victoria Robinson, eds. *Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1993), 204.

(b) if appropriate, the views of the child;
(c) the love, affection and similar ties that exist between the child and other persons;
(d) education and training for the child;
(e) the capacity of each person to whom guardianship, custody or access rights and duties may be granted to exercise those rights and duties adequately.[6]

Some of my co-researchers' had abusive ex-spouses who were awarded custody of their children. A review of their comments about their spouse's parenting does not reveal any instances of abuse to a degree that would warrant removal of their children from his home by the Ministry of Children and Families. One of my co-researchers suggested that research should be conducted to see if children who live with abusive ex-spouses exhibit signs of abuse and how to determine what custody arrangements are in the child's best interest. Perhaps until this research is done the judicial system should be cautioned against awarding custody to a spouse that exhibited abusive behaviour towards his or her partner during the relationship. This type of policy may create a more just system that does not seemingly reward the abusive partner.

The fifth area in which my research suggests reform may be appropriate is in the area of family mediation. Although research indicates that mediation does not work where there is a power imbalance, there appears to be no method of eliminating power imbalances between ex-spouses in some instances.[7] When mediation proceeds in this situation the low power individual may be unable to advocate on their own behalf and their inability to do so may be viewed negatively. In these cases when a spouse is awarded custody of the children his/her abuse is being rewarded. Joan's story suggests that some men, whether consciously or unconsciously, may be using this fact to gain custody of their children. Consequently,

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[6] BC Statute, *Family Relations Act* (1996) RS Chap. 128, Section 24, 11.
[7] Joyce L. Hocker & William W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 4th ed. (Madison: WCB Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1995), 223.

policy should provide an alternate method of helping ex-partners negotiate custody and separation arrangements than mediation when the former relationship included power imbalances.

My co-researchers identified a need for social transformation in nine areas in addition to the five areas for governmental policy reform I found. First, all of them desired a reduction in their oppression, especially a reduction of the negative social judgements. Second, each of them wanted to negotiate a space to continue making decision on her child's behalf. Third, they identified a need to support young women with personal problems, mothers who were inadequately parented, mothers whose children have disabilities associated with behavioural problems, and all mothers so that they can meet their own needs and those of their children. Fourth, they saw a need for judicial policy that treated parents fairly and take a holistic approach when making decisions about children's custody. Fifth, they saw a need for positive and true-to-life media representations of mothers who live apart from their children. Sixth, they saw a need for affordable and identifiable support for mothers (and fathers) that live apart from their children. Seventh, they felt that professional care-providers should have an awareness of their experiences. Eighth, they saw a need for our society to expect fathers and mothers to meet the same standards. Finally, one mother mentioned the need to encourage every mother, regardless of ability, to be a part of her children's life.

Limitations

From a feminist perspective, my research is valid. It suggests an alternate interpretation of events that rang true for my co-researchers when I shared it with them, worked when I checked it through comparative analysis, and fit with the available literature.

The processes I used of discussing my analysis with some of my co-researchers and making my critical analysis visible also adds to its integrity.

My research, like other feminist case study research, is not intended to develop broad general theories and does not do so. Instead, it is responsive to a few mothers in specific situations, uncovers some of the problems in their lives, and makes suggestion for some policy changes to improve their situations. My research did not include any women from many of the categories that one might expect to live apart from their children, such as women who freely chose to live apart from their children, and mothers with disabilities which restrict their ability to parent. Nor did it include the story of the one mother who chose to withdraw. My research also did not include fathers, children, or the mothers' care-providers. It is thus based solely on the perspective of six mothers as interpreted by me, the primary researcher.

Further Research

My research was fruitful in identifying areas for further research. My co-researchers volunteered four areas in which they would like to see further research and my discussions with them and personal reflections identified four other areas. My co-researchers wanted to know what are the effects of the following: 1) children growing up apart from their mothers, 2) children growing up with a father who abused their mother and continues to be controlling towards her and perhaps them, 3) whether or not adults that grow up apart from their mothers recognise and use more child-care strategies than do other adults, and 4) one mother, who had recovered from addictions, wanted to know if other women had also gained control over their addictions after healing from emotional pain.[8]

[8] Margaret E. Goldberg, et al., "Impact of Maternal Alcoholism on Separation of Children from their Mothers: Findings from a Sample of Incarcerated Women," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 66, no.2 (April 1996),

My personal reflections and analysis identified the following areas for further research. First, what really is in 'the best interest of the child?' and how it might be determined. Is there a space in which fathers', mothers', and children's needs can be met after marital dissolution even if an ex-spouse is abusive? Second, what would be the effects of reallocating resources so those mothers of children with behavioural problems could continue to parent them? What resources would they need to be able to do so? Third, what are the interactions for a mother who lives apart from her children with other factors that also push her to the margins such as being disabled or on welfare? Finally, do mothers that have more agency in their decision to live apart from their child have different experiences and interpretations of those experiences than did the mothers I interviewed?

Conclusion

My thesis grew out of my desire to reduce the oppression of a particular group of women – mothers who live apart from their children. In my research, I used case studies together with Feminist Grounded Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory to investigate the experiences of six mothers.

My thesis adds to the existing literature by exploring custody issues for women in North Central British Columbia. This is an area previously not included in research about mothers without custody. My research suggests how our social structure oppresses mothers without their children, and explores the feelings of mothers about both the separation from their children and the stigmatisation they receive. It also documents that mothers without their children are marginalised members of our society, which has not been noted in the existing literature on mothers.

236, show a relationship between alcohol consumption and living apart from one's children. It also shows that stress can precipitate excessive alcohol consumption. Addictions are not my area of expertise and the research

In Chapter1, I reviewed motherhood from a cross-cultural and historical perspective. In Chapter 2, I reviewed feminist theory, presented my methodology, and examined how they related to my research question, 'what are the experience of mothers who live apart from their children?' In Chapters 3 and 4, I analysed my data from two focal lengths. Chapter 3 tells my co-researchers' stories and Chapter 4 provides the insights into their experiences that I gleaned through reflection on my interactions with their stories and the masses of literature I have been fortunate enough to read. In this final chapter I have synthesised and discussed the themes from both analysis chapters, discussed the implications of my research for social and public policy reform, and identified areas for further research that became apparent either from my co-researchers' suggestion or through personal reflection.

My research demonstrates the effects of marginalisation on a particular group of mothers who live apart from their children, namely a group of women from the dominant culture and three of its social classes. The mothers who participated in my research seem to have experienced little agency or choice in their decisions to live apart from their children. My research thus is limited to this particular multiple case study. My findings about stigmatisation and social judgement are similar to those of other feminist authors. They demonstrate how marginalisation disempowers individuals and prevents their voices from being heard.

My research suggests a few areas in which some mothers who live apart from their children experience discrimination. It also points to the likelihood of some of their experiences of subordination being shared by the majority of mothers, such as the

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this mother suggests may already be available.

discounting of their knowledge about their children and the expectation that they provide continuous care for their children.

There are two ways in which my research has the potential to benefit women. First, by increasing our knowledge about a particular group of marginalised women and including their experiences in our understanding of motherhood. Second, by enlarging our awareness of the degree to which 'experts' have displaced mothers as the best people to determine what is best for our children. It is in this latter area where using further research and activism, feminists have the greatest opportunity to change society. In the 1970s, our work garnered for some of us the opportunity to determine our birthing experiences. Although some of the changes we made have been eroded, many others have been consolidated and become the norm. Our work in that period left me with the knowledge that it is possible to transform the systems created by 'experts' so that they meet our needs. In particular, it convinced me that in any system run by 'experts,' at least some experts will be dissatisfied with the status quo and be willing to co-operate to change the system. I hope that my research on mothers without their children will prompt such experts to help women without their children so that social transformation occurs.

Appendix A: Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

3333 University Way

Prince George, B. C. V2N 4Z9

Consent Form to Participate in Research

This is to state that I agree to participate in some interviews with Julie Thacker for her research on "Mothers Who Live Apart From Their Children."

1. I understand that the purpose of this research is to examine mothers' perspectives about living apart from their children and that I have seen the information sheet for participants.
2. I understand that I will be asked to participate in two interviews of approximately one hour each. Later interviews or contacts will be briefer. All interviews will be arranged to take place at a mutually convenient time and location.
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw consent to use my information or continue to participate in the interview process at any time.
4. I agree that Julie Thacker may use data from this study in her thesis, presentations, and publications.
5. I understand this research project involves discussing information that I may find upsetting. I also acknowledge that Julie Thacker has provided me with several sources to assist me if I need any support after an interview.
6. I understand that my participation in the study will not be revealed (unless I choose to self-disclose it) and that any information I provide will be kept confidential. However, I also acknowledge that Julie Thacker is required, by law, to report to the appropriate authorities any information involving past or current child abuse.
7. I understand that a pseudonym will be used to keep track of my information and that all identifying information will be removed before Julie Thacker uses my data in her research.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT, AND THEREFORE I FREELY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH.

NAME: _____ SIGNATURE: _____

(Please print)

RESEARCHER: _____ DATE: _____

Appendix B -- Information sheet

Mothers Who Live Separate from Their Children

Goal: To determine what the experiences and feelings are of mothers who live separate from their children.

Who: Mothers who do not have custody of their child(ren) less than 17 years old.

What: Interviews will cover these three areas:

1. How it came about that you live apart from your child(ren).
2. Your experiences and feelings about living apart from your child(ren).
3. Your experiences and feelings about any support or disapproval received from society about living apart from your child(ren).

Where & When: Interview times and locations will be at a mutually convenient time and location for the participant and researcher.

How long: Two interviews of approximately one hour in length. Later briefer in person or telephone contacts will likely be necessary. Overall time commitment is expected to be about three hours.

Why: I am using the information gathered in this research to help me write my thesis for Masters degree in Gender Studies.

If you have any questions about the study or would like to take part, please do not hesitate to call me.
Contact: Julie Thacker, B.Sc., M.A. Candidate, Gender Studies, at 563-1467.

You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Marianne Ainley, at 960-6681, if you have concerns about this study.

Appendix D

CARE-PROVIDERS

I understand that your experiences about living apart from your child(ren) may be a sensitive areas for you to discuss. I will respect this during the interviews. The following care-providers have agreed to help if the interviews upset you and you require assistance.

Lynn Oldale, M.Div. Pastoral Counselling. Grace Anglican Church 562-5611. -- There is an answering machine when the church office is closed. Lynn has agreed to provide face to face counselling as well as some telephone counselling for about a week after each interview if you need it.

Elizabeth Fry Society -- Please call for concerns that are likely related to either past or present abuse issues. Call the office at 563-1113 to make appointments for face to face counselling or call the shelter 562-5868 for telephone crisis counselling between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m. E. Fry's mandate is to provide assistance for women associated with past or present abuse. They are a good resource if you need assistance in these areas regardless of what or who the sources of the abuse were or are.

Prince George Crisis Line -- 563-1214. The crisis line provides para-professional telephone counselling twenty-four hours a day on all issues for people in emotional crisis. They will assist you in identifying further support if you feel the need.

Appendix E

INTERVIEW PROCESS

First Interview (Questions)

- About you
  Where were you born?
  How old are you?
  What grade did you complete in school?
  How long ago was that?
  What is your cultural background?
  Where did you grow up?
  What type of relationship did you have with your mother?
- Mothering
  What does it mean to be a family?
  What does it mean to be a mother?
- About your child(ren)
  How old are they?
  Where are they now?
  Do you get to visit with or see your children?
- About the separation:
  How long ago did your child(ren) first begin living in a different home from you?
  Could you please tell me what events led up to your child living separate from you?
- Could you please tell me about your experiences about living apart from your children.
- Could you please tell me about your feelings about living apart from your children.
- Could you please tell me about any experiences of support received from society about living apart from your child(ren). How do you feel about these experiences?
- Could you please tell me about any experiences of disapproval received from society about living apart from your child(ren). How do you feel about these experiences?

Second and following interviews:

During the second and following interviews I will finish gathering data on the above areas, clarify areas I am uncertain about, and follow up on any themes that appear to be developing in each person's data.

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